

What If Snape Died?

"You did what!" shouted James Potter at his best friend Sirius Black. They were inside the Shrieking Shack with their other friends, Peter Pettigrew and Remus Lupin. Remus had what they referred to as a 'furry little problem.' At every full moon, he would transform into a werewolf, and would temporarily lose his mind and attack any human he could find. The other three had learned to become animagi, so they would transform into animals and accompany Remus on those occasions, such as tonight. Together, they called themselves the 'Marauders.' It was the night after they took their final exams for their sixth year at Hogwarts.

Sirius was laughing as he said, "I told Snivelus that he'd find something interesting if he came up here tonight."

"You idiot!" shouted James. "He could get killed if he..."

At that moment Remus began his transformation and immediately went after the yelling human. Sirius and Peter transformed at once, and a big black dog that was Sirius Black got between the werewolf and James. Instead of transforming into a stag, he decided to run out of the room to stop Snape from coming, closing the door behind him. As he ran down the passage, he saw the greasy git walking toward him with an ugly, satisfied sneer on his face.

"James Potter, out of bounds are we? What would Dumbledore say?"

"Snape," yelled James desperately as he heard something tearing at the door behind him, "You've got to get out of here now!"

"And let the three of you get away with more rule-breaking? You strut around this school like you can get away with anything, but now you're afraid of a little detention. My, my," said the git, "it seems you finally realize that you don't own the school."

"Fine," said James, "You can turn me in! We'll leave together now!"

"And let your friends miss out on the fun?" said Snape as he started to walk past James. James grabbed him and tackled him to the floor easily, but Snape managed to grab his wand. Suddenly, James found

himself floating off of his rival, and was hanging upside down in midair. "I think I'll leave you like that until we leave. Accio, wand," he said, causing James' wand to fly out of his pocket into Snape's hand as he sneered.

At that moment, the door ahead of him broke, and a werewolf started running at Snape, followed by a big black dog. Momentarily startled, he didn't raise a wand to defend himself as the werewolf rushed upon him, first slashing his chest with a claw. The pain caused Severus to drop his wand as he began bleeding horribly. After a few more slashes, the dog got between the werewolf and his victim, and James Potter fell to the ground because the caster of the spell was now dead. James transformed into a stag, knowing that if he didn't, he'd be the werewolf's next victim. The stag gave the dog the most venomous look he could, clearly stating that James Potter blamed Sirius Black for what had happened.

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The next morning, after Remus had transformed back to normal, he, James, and Sirius made their way to Dumbledore's office to inform him of what had transpired. James and Sirius confessed to being illegal animagi. They saw no reason to include Peter in the confession, since he'd had nothing to do with it. James could swear he saw the headmaster age thirty years before his eyes.

Dumbledore sighed and said, "I must confess that I'm very disappointed in all of you."

"It was my fault," said a devastated Lupin, "I killed him."

"Although you share blame for allowing your friends to accompany you, you were not responsible for Severus' coming to the Shrieking Shack, and were not in control of yourself at the time. Do not be too harsh upon yourself, as the punishments I'm afraid I must hand out will be severe enough. Remus, I'm afraid that when the governors are made aware of this tragedy, I'll be forced to expel you. I'll probably never be able to allow any other child with your condition to enroll again." Remus hung his head in shame. "Sirius, I'm afraid that this time you have gone too far in your jokes. I have no choice but to

expel you as well. Tomorrow you two will leave on the Hogwarts Express with everyone else, but will not be returning.”

“Yes sir,” said a very distressed Sirius, “I can’t tell you how sorry I am.”

“James Potter, since you were not part of Mr. Black’s prank, and were in fact trying to save Severus’ life, you will not be expelled. However, you will have to stay at Hogwarts for the summer with Mr. Filch, giving the castle the most thorough cleaning it has had in the thousand years that it has been standing.”

“Thank you sir,” said James.

“It is my wish that the general population not know that there was a werewolf attending Hogwarts, and that a student was killed by one. The story told to the students will be that Severus was killed by the whomping willow, and that Mr. Black and Mr. Lupin had lured him out as a joke. Mr. Potter was also out of bounds, but had no knowledge of this particular joke. We will also keep your abilities to transform into animals between just us.”

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They left his office, and made their way to Gryffindor tower. After they told Pettigrew what the punishments were, Remus and Sirius began packing. Peter was already packed, and James didn’t have ant need to pack.

Sirius said, “I guess I’ll have to go back to my mom’s house and hope she’ll take me in. She might be proud of me now that I’m a murderer.”

“I’m the murderer,” argued Lupin.

“You’re not murderers, and Sirius, you’re not going back there!” said James. “You made a mistake, a bad one, but just a mistake. It was an accident! I’m sure mum and dad wouldn’t kick you out because of a mistake. You’re both of age and can practice magic outside of school! I’ll bet that if the two of you study the books for next year, they’ll let you take the N.E.W.T. exams with me. Write Dumbledore this

summer after things have calmed down. Things will work out. I know it.”

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The summer went by slowly for James, cleaning every inch of Hogwarts the muggle way with Filch standing over him talking about ‘the old punishments.’ He almost believed he deserved to be hanging by his toes with Filch laughing. Sure he hated Snape, but he didn’t want him to die. As much as he told himself otherwise, he blamed himself for the death. If he’d have stunned Snape instead of tackle him. If he wouldn’t have wasted time trying to reason with the idiot, maybe he’d still be alive and his two best friends wouldn’t have been expelled. A month into the summer, he got a letter from Sirius that said Dumbledore had agreed to let them take the N.E.W.T exams. They would stay in guest quarters during those days. Since there wasn’t a full moon scheduled for the time of the exams, it wouldn’t be a problem for Lupin.

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James was shocked beyond belief when the Hogwarts letter he’d received while scrubbing the floor of the Slytherin boys’ bathroom said he would be Head Boy. When Filch finally let him go, he went straight to Dumbledore’s office. He said, “Sir, I think there’s been a mistake. My letter said I’m Head Boy, but that’s impossible. Even if it weren’t for the trouble I’m in, I haven’t even been a prefect.”

“It is a common misconception that the Head Boy and Girl have to have been prefects. While it is common, and in fact the Head Girl has been a prefect, there is no rule that states that it is necessary,” he said with a twinkle in his eyes. “While the action that you are being punished for was severe, I feel that one cannot let one incident undo a lot of good. I know that you and your friends have, shall we say, brought excitement to the school, but you have always been a talented student and have stood up to prejudiced people such as Snape. As I’m sure you’re aware, Lord Voldemort is starting to gain more supporters. I feel we need strong Heads that will do what’s right, even if it means breaking a few rules. When Voldemort was a student here, he always obeyed the rules perfectly, but in his heart he was

evil. You, on the other hand, have disobeyed several school rules, but in your heart you are good.”

“Thank you sir,” said James, who’s ears turned slightly pink at that compliment. “By the way, who’s the Head Girl?”

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He couldn’t believe it, Lily Evans, the girl he’d had a crush on since he started at Hogwarts, was the Head Girl. He smiled for a second, but then frowned when he thought, “She couldn’t stand you before, now what will she think of you?”

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Near the end of the summer, he was allowed one day to spend with his family and friends and to do his school shopping. Before he knew it, he was finished with detention and was sitting in the Great Hall wearing his Head Boy badge (along with his quidditch captain badge), waiting for the other students to arrive on the Hogwarts Express. He knew that this would be a strange year, not having Sirius or Remus with him. He wondered how Lily would react to his new position. When the other students arrived, he saw the beautiful Lily Evans at the front of the line, looking at him, the sole occupant of the Gryffindor (or any student) table. She walked toward him with an expression that appeared like she was going to gloat about his punishment, but then he noticed her lovely emerald eyes widen as they rested on his Head Boy badge. He saw her mouth the words, “What the Hell?” She walked up to him and said, “I thought the new Head Boy was sick, not...”

“Me?” said James. Whatever arrogance he may have had before was gone. “When I got the badge, I thought it was a mistake and went to see Dumbledore. I was cleaning a Slytherin washroom at the time.” He took a deep breath. “I know I don’t deserve it, Evans. It’s not fair to people like you who’ve worked hard for the position.” He sighed. “But I am Head Boy, and truthfully don’t understand why, and I don’t really know all of my duties yet. Filch has had me working fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, so haven’t had the chance to read the manual. I’d really appreciate it if you could let me know what I’m supposed to do.”

Lily looked horrified. "Fourteen hours a day? Seven days a week? I know what you did was bad, but..."

"I deserved it!" said James firmly. "If you ask me I should've been expelled, not made Head Boy. I'm sorry that you're stuck sharing the Head's common room with me. You deserve a better person than me to help you with your duties. I'll try to stay out of your way as much as possible. If you need help with anything, let me know."

- changing to Lily's perspective

Lily was startled. She'd always thought of James Potter as arrogant, but this man wearing a Head Boy badge was just the opposite. He seemed to feel he wasn't fit to live. She'd never been friends with him before, but he looked like he needed one now. She knew that his two best friends had been expelled, and that Peter had been more of a sidekick than a friend to them. She decided to set aside their past arguments and befriend him.

She first helped him learn his Head Boy duties, and then they started helping each other in classes. She was surprised at how good he was at transfiguration. He helped her improve in that class while she helped him in potions. It wasn't long before she and James were inseparable. When rumors about them dating started spreading around the school, it made her blush. She said to herself, "We are not dating; we're just friends. I have no romantic interest in him. Just because he's so handsome, and this year he's been so sweet, so considerate of me, and...ok, maybe I do like him, but he doesn't like me. Just because he hasn't dated anyone else this year doesn't mean we're dating. He just thinks of me as a friend, and so that's what I'll be."

At the Halloween feast, Dumbledore made an announcement that would change this. "This year, on the day before most of you will go home for the Christmas holidays, we will have a Yule Ball. I suggest you get dates as soon as possible."

James, who'd been sitting next to her, immediately tapped her on the shoulder. "Lily," he said.

"Yes," she said, turning toward him. He appeared nervous.

“Would you go ball me?”

“What?” she asked, not daring to believe what she thought he’d said. If he was asking her to the ball, why would he be nervous? She’d seen him call across the room to ask a girl to go out with him before.

James took a deep breath. “Will you do me the honor of being my date for the Yule Ball?”

She tried her hardest not to blush. She knew that James had his pick of almost any girl in the school, yet he immediately asked her. She decided not to act too excited. “Well, I guess so.”

The look of excitement on his face at her acceptance was something that she’d always remember. “You will?” he asked. She nodded. There was no mistaking it. He would not be this excited if they were going as friends. He fancied her. She smiled at him.

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That Yule Ball was probably the most fun she’d ever had at Hogwarts. He seemed to want to dance every song with her, and was very reluctant to let anyone else dance with her. As Heads, they had to make sure that all the students were back in their towers. They finally got back to the Heads’ common room very late after sending several snogging couples running.

“Well,” said Lily, “This has been a lovely evening.”

“Thank you for coming with me,” said James, peering into her eyes. “I’ve never told you this, but I think that you are one of the kindest, most wonderful people I’ve ever met.”

She turned a bit pink. “I’m not all that kind...”

“You’re speaking to me aren’t you?” He sighed, “You’re also one of the brightest witches I’ve ever met.”

“There are a lot of people smarter than me,” she said smiling.

"You're not like the other girls I've dated," said James, "They just wanted to date me because I was popular. You're also far, far more beautiful than any of them."

Her cheeks were red now as her heart rate increased, "I'm not all that..."

"I know I don't deserve the right to ask, but would you be my girlfriend?"

Her heart stopped for a second. She considered her options. By now she knew that she fancied him and he fancied her. Should she make him squirm or beg? She realized that she would really be denying herself what she wanted, which was to snog this gorgeous man until he couldn't remember his own name. She looked him in the eyes and said gently, licking her lips in an inviting way, "I would love to be your girlfriend." He leaned forward and tentatively kissed her. She ran her fingers in his ever-messy raven hair and deepened the kiss.

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Their relationship grew from that point on, and they married a month after graduation. Sirius was James' Best Man, and Remus was also in the wedding party. Both of them had passed their N.E.W.T.s with flying colors. Peter, who'd pretty much been alone the whole year since James started hanging out with Lily at the beginning of term, had disappeared immediately after graduation. The day before the wedding, Dumbledore had informed them that Pettigrew had been killed with other Death Eaters, participating in a muggle attack. James silently wondered if he could have prevented that by hanging out with Pettigrew, but doubted it.

That Christmas, James got more than just a gift from Lily. She informed him that she was two months pregnant. He was ecstatic, and immediately insisted that Sirius be the baby's godfather. He happily accepted, honored that they would give him this responsibility. They soon found out that another member of the Order of the Phoenix, Alice Longbottom, was also due to have a baby at the end of July.

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The months flew by quickly (for everyone but Lily), and soon it was early June. The students had just left on the Hogwarts Express, and Professor Dumbledore had an appointment with an applicant for Divination professor at the Three Broomsticks. After spending five minutes with her, he realized that she was a complete fraud. He started leaving as soon as he could politely do so, and then she went rigid, and her voice changed. She said,

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies.”

When she was done speaking, her voice returned to normal and she had no memory of the prophecy. He left the pub, and was relieved to find that no one had overheard. As he contemplated the prophecy later in his office, he came to the conclusion that it had to be either the Potters' child or the Longbottoms' child. He briefly considered informing the parents, but realized that it would be safest if nobody knew about it. If Voldemort were to learn of the prophecy, he'd probably kill both babies, along with their families. He would simply wait to see what would happen.

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Both children were born at the end of July, which didn't help Dumbledore narrow it down. He had hoped that one of them would have been born in August. At least then he'd know which child the prophecy referred to.

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The years passed by quickly as the war with Voldemort continued. He was getting bolder and bolder with his attacks, convinced that no one could stop him. Before long the two children were five years old. James and Lily Potter were each holding one of little Harry's hands, as they walked through Diagon Alley. They didn't often come here, but they needed to get Harry new clothes. He just wouldn't quit that

growing! They walked out of the shop with their packages when it happened. Thirty Death Eaters, followed by Voldemort himself, apparated into the middle of the street, and began wreaking havoc. James and Lily were guarding their son, trying to get him to safety when they were recognized by Voldemort. "Well, well. Mr. and Mrs. Potter. This must be your son," he said with snake-like voice.

"You leave my mummy and daddy alone!" shouted little Harry.

"Quite a temper you've got. Obviously your parents haven't disciplined you enough." He pointed his wand at the five year old boy and said, "Crucio!"

Harry fell to the floor crying in pain for a few seconds before James fired a spell at Voldemort, shouting, "He's just a child you monster!" The spell didn't hurt Voldemort, but blocking it distracted the dark lord from his torture of Harry.

He smiled at James. "I guess I should kill you first, then."

"Don't hurt my daddy!" shouted Harry.

"Quiet Harry," said Lily, who was right beside him.

"Harry, is it?" asked Voldemort, "You don't want to see me hurt your parents, do you Harry?" He didn't wait for an answer. "I'll do you a favor. I won't make you watch." He pointed his wand at Harry, then sneered as he said, "Avada Kadavra."

As the green light shot from Voldemort's wand, Lily threw herself in front of her son. When it hit her and she fell dead, Harry cried out, "Mummy, mummy!" while James watched in shock.

Voldemort laughed, "She shouldn't have made you watch that. Let me ease your pain." He pointed his wand at Harry yet again and said, "Avada Kadavra."

The green beam of light hit Harry in the forehead, but he didn't die. Instead, the beam bounced back at Voldemort, who screamed out in anguish as his body seemed to turn into a spirit and fly away. The approximately ten remaining Death Eaters, upon seeing their master

defeated, apparated away. James, with tears streaming down his eyes, walked over to his crying son. He noticed a deep bleeding cut on Harry's forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt. He picked him up and hugged him close. As they cried together, they didn't notice people around them beginning to celebrate, calling Harry Potter, "The Boy Who Lived."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 2 – Changes

James Potter was basically in a daze. He secretly wondered how he'd managed to get his son home. Someone had handed him the bag full of new clothes that Lily had been carrying when she died. Lily. Just thinking of her made him start to cry again. A healer had shown up at the scene and stopped the bleeding from Harry's forehead, but said that he would always have that curse scar to remind him of his mother's death. He was vaguely aware that Voldemort was apparently vanquished, but at the moment all he could think about was Lily, and how he was going to go on living without her.

He was interrupted from his thoughts by Harry coming up to him crying, "Mummy's never coming back is she?"

He patted his son's head, and said, "No Harry. Voldemort killed her," as his swollen eyes started crying yet again.

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After James put Harry to bed, he walked over to his own bedroom, and looked around. Everywhere he looked were reminders of his beloved wife. He quickly changed into pajamas, grabbed a pillow and blanket, and left the room. There was no way he would be able to sleep in that room tonight. Instead of going to a guestroom, James decided to sleep on the sofa. He put his pillow at one end of the sofa and lay down on his side, draping the blanket over him. An hour later, he was just starting to drift off when a noise startled him. He reached for his wand, only to find that little Harry had left his room.

Harry said, "Daddy, I had a bad dream. Can I sleep with you?"

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James awoke to a knock on his door. Judging by how bright it was outside the window, he must have overslept. Harry was still asleep beside him. He got up carefully and slipped on a robe that he kept near the door. He opened up the door to see the leader of the Order of the Phoenix, Albus Dumbledore standing outside. "Hello Albus," James said, "come on in." James figured that it had begun. Friend after friend would now start showing up to say how sorry they were

for his loss. He was not looking forward to that. It was bad enough that he had to arrange a funeral.

Dumbledore stepped inside and said, "James, I can't tell you how sorry I was to hear about Lily, but that's not exactly what I'm here for."

At that moment Harry, who was still in his pajamas said, "Hello Professor Dumbledore."

"Well hello young Mr. Potter. How are you?"

"Sad, sir," he said with his head facing the floor. "I miss mummy."

"Of course you do Harry," said Dumbledore gently. "I do too. Many people do. She was a wonderful person. Do you mind if I take a look at that cut you got yesterday?"

"No sir," said Harry, "It looks like lightning."

Dumbledore moved Harry's hair so that he could better see the scar. "Very interesting. Does it hurt?"

"No sir."

"Do you mind if I discuss some things with your father for a few minutes?"

"No sir," said Harry, who walked off in the direction of his room.

"A very polite boy you've got there James," said Albus.

"Lily taught him to be like that," said James sadly, "What exactly did you want to talk to me about?"

Albus pointed his wand at the outside door and the hallway, ensuring them privacy. He sighed, "I guess I'll start from the beginning. A few months before Harry was born, I was given a prophecy..." Albus told him the story of how he'd received it. "...and now that Harry has that scar, I believe that he's the one that the prophecy was about. He's been marked by the dark lord. Last year I'd wondered if it was Neville Longbottom when his father was killed by Lucius Malfoy when Fudge

made Frank escort Mr. Malfoy home for protection, but it didn't add up, so I never told Alice about the prophecy." He sighed, "At least Fudge did send Lucius to Azkaban, and most importantly, demanded that everyone who enters the ministry roll up their sleeves for inspection. Almost a dozen ministry employees were revealed to be Death Eaters as a result of this. Even Barty Crouch Jr. was caught because of this."

"So," said James, "To get back to our original topic, you don't believe Voldemort is gone for good. Harry will have to face him again."

"Voldemort is effectively vanquished for the moment, but yes, I believe he will return. Hopefully it won't be until Harry has grown up, but we have no way of knowing that. Also, there are many Death Eaters still free who want to avenge their master's defeat. They will think nothing of harming Harry. Not only that, but now he has instantly become a celebrity in our world. They have now dubbed him, 'the boy who lived.'"

"What's your point," said James.

"The point is that I think he needs better protection. If you send him to be raised at Petunia Dursley's home, where his mother's blood is, I can create more powerful wards than any place on earth. Not only that, but he'll be away from the fame until he's older."

"No," said James, his face red with anger, "First of all, I will not give my son away to be raised by someone else! Secondly, I would rather kill Harry than send him to the Dursleys!"

"But James, you must..."

"No! This issue is closed! Harry is my son, not yours. If you have nothing else to discuss, then your business here is over."

"Very well, I won't suggest that again, but I still believe you need better protection."

"Where do you think Harry can be safe without separating him from me?"

“The safest place I know is Hogwarts. I could use a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. If you would consent to take that position, you and Harry could move to the castle.”

“Change jobs?” asked James.

“Truthfully James,” Albus said, “Being an auror is dangerous business. You never know what dangers you’re facing. If you work as a professor, you’ll have a safer profession, as well as better hours which will allow you to spend more time with your son. At Hogwarts, you could start Harry’s defense education early so that he is ready if he should be attacked. Not only that, but he’ll have access to proper medical facilities should he need them.”

He took a deep breath. “I suppose that I could make a career change for Harry’s sake. I know I’d like some time away from this house.”

“Excellent,” said Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes, “I shall make the preparations immediately so that you can move in as soon as you’ve set your affairs at the ministry in order.” Dumbledore released his privacy spells and left.

Harry came out of his room and walked up to his father. “What did Professor Dumbledore want, Daddy?”

“He wants me to teach at Hogwarts, Harry. We’re gonna move there.”

Harry’s face brightened up. “Then I get to live by Neville!”

James smiled at seeing his son happy again. “Yes son, you’ll get to play with Neville a lot more often now.” He took out a piece of parchment and wrote a letter of resignation to the Ministry of Magic.

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Because of his wife’s recent death, his supervisor didn’t make him work for two weeks prior to quitting. Truthfully, his boss felt he’d be distracted thinking about his wife’s murder anyway, so it was for the best. They were having a small private funeral today, with aurors making sure nobody tried to interrupt it, either to kill Harry or to get his autograph. After the funeral, Alice Longbottom, who’d been a

close friend of Lily's since they met at Hogwarts, walked up to James and Harry, while holding her son Neville's hand. There were tears in her eyes as she hugged James tightly. When she pulled away she said, "She was far too young to die. I know exactly what you're going through James. If you ever need someone to talk to, I'm here." James nodded at her. "I understand that we're going to be colleagues again."

James smiled briefly, "Yeah. Dumbledore offered me the job the day after Lily died."

"I guess he felt you needed a change," said Alice, moving some of her brown hair out of her eyes.

"Something like that," said James.

"I know I needed a change after Frank died. Teaching Potions at Hogwarts really has helped me get over his death, and I'm sure that teaching will help you too. I'm glad that Neville will have someone his own age to play with now." She smiled. "When will you be moving to Hogwarts?"

"Tomorrow," said James.

"I'll bet you can't wait to get away from your house. You won't believe this, but I couldn't even sleep in my bed after Frank died."

James chuckled, "I haven't been in my bed yet. The first night I slept on the couch. Now I'm in a guestroom. It just doesn't seem right to sleep in that room without her."

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The next morning, James got Harry up early and got their stuff together. He apparated them to Hogsmeade, and then levitated their trunks in front of them as they walked to a carriage pulled by weird-looking lizard-horses that scared little Harry. "What are they?" he asked his daddy.

"They're called thestrals, Harry, but despite their appearance, they're actually friendly." He decided not to tell Harry that most people can't see them, and why he could see them.

Since it wasn't time for a meal, they went straight to the quarters Dumbledore had written him about when they made the arrangements. James stuck the key Dumbledore had sent him into the lock, and then opened the door. James said, "Harry, this is our new home."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 3 – First Days

Harry looked around their new home with his father right behind him. It had maroon carpet and white walls. There was a couch and a recliner that both matched the carpet. The bathroom was magnificent, and included a bathtub that Little Harry could almost swim in. He started smiling until he remembered something. He softly muttered, "Mummy used to give me baths," and started crying.

James gave Harry a small hug and said, "That's right, Harry, she did. I know you miss her, and so do I. We've got to hold on to memories like that." James smiled. "I can remember you splashing her, getting her clothes so wet that I accused her of taking a shower with her clothes on." James took a deep breath. "She would want us to go on living, and to be happy. Do you understand that, Harry?"

"Yes, daddy, but I can't. I miss her so much."

James hugged his son quickly and said, "Let's take a look at your new room!"

Harry excitedly looked into his room. It had a big four poster bed with maroon curtains that matched the floor he could pull around the bed. It also had a desk and chair. He jumped onto the bed and said, "Wow! This bed is soft."

"I'm glad you like it," said James.

"When do I get to play with Neville?" asked Harry.

"I don't know. We'll probably see him and your Aunt Alice at lunch in a few hours. Until then, how about if I levitate you to the ceiling." James pointed his wand at Harry, and said, "Wingardium Leviosa." He could have done it silently, but wanted his son to learn the spell.

As Harry started rising from the floor, he began laughing hysterically.

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As James predicted, the Longbottoms were at lunch. As soon as Harry saw Neville at the table, he loudly shouted, "Neville," and ran to

sit by him. Dumbledore smiled and McGonagall frowned, but no one said anything about it. James' ears went pink and he put his face in his right hand for a minute to hide his laughter. When he lifted his head back up, he saw Alice Longbottom smiling at him as Neville and Harry were busily talking with their mouths full. He sat down next to her at the table.

After lunch, Neville and Harry ran around the grounds of Hogwarts, with the parents walking behind them. Alice asked James, "How's Harry doing?"

James shrugged his shoulders. "I honestly don't know. Sometimes he's excited like now, and then sometimes he's crying. I don't want him to forget about his mother, but at the same time, I want him to stop crying." He sighed, "I don't know what to do. Hopefully this change will help."

"I know it helped Neville. I think the main thing is to be there when he needs to talk about Lily. I know some people try to forget about their loved ones, but that's an insult to their memory. Lily was a wonderful person and doesn't deserve to be forgotten."

He took a deep breath. "I know I'll never forget her." He smiled. "Why she ever fell in love with me I'll never know."

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The day passed quickly, and before they knew it, the four of them were entering the Great Hall for dinner. When they walked into the room, it was pitch black. James pulled out his wand, and was about to cast the 'lumos' spell, when the lights came on and a bunch of voices, including Alice's, shouted, "Surprise!"

James looked around and saw Dumbledore wearing a weird party hat, along with his friends, Sirius Black and Remus Lupin. The entire staff of Hogwarts was there, as well as most of the Order. Dumbledore said, "We wanted to properly welcome our new professor and his son."

"Uncle Sirius, Uncle Remus!" shouted Harry as he ran into first Sirius' and then Remus' arms.

James caught up with Sirius, asking about how things were going in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. According to Sirius, "Things are a lot better without Voldemort running loose. We've spent most of our time rounding up leftover Death Eaters. At least now that the ministry checks for the Dark Mark, we don't have a bunch of them claiming they were under the Imperious Curse."

James then turned to Lupin and asked, "How are the finances of the Potter and Black Estates?"

Remus smiled and said in his most business-like tone, "As your official financial manager, I can tell you that in financial terms, you and Mr. Black are still filthy-stinking rich."

"That's good," said James.

"Now that the small talk is out of the way," said Sirius, "How are you and Harry doing?"

"We're doing ok. I'm glad that Harry hasn't been around too many strangers since it, it happened. I'm not looking forward to taking him shopping next. Not only will it be the first time he's been shopping since his mum was killed in front of him, but he's likely to be swamped by a bunch of people wanting his autograph. I'm putting that off as long as I can." He sighed. "I wonder what it'll be like for Harry in a few weeks when the students arrive. At least he won't have to interact with them if he doesn't want to. Dumbledore said that if Harry wants, we can arrange to eat in our quarters after the term starts. I'll wait to see how Harry reacts to the other children."

"So," said Lupin, "Do you have any idea why Voldemort was vanquished?"

"Dumbledore said it was his Lily's sacrifice. She jumped in front of Harry the first time that monster shot the killing curse at him. Dumbledore said that sacrifice put a protection on Harry that Voldemort couldn't penetrate. He says it's some sort of old magic."

"Does Harry like it here?" asked Sirius. "This place can be pretty lonely for a small child."

“Well,” said James, smiling, “At least he has Neville Longbottom to play with.”

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Time passed quickly with Harry and Neville playing together every day while James and Alice watched them. There were times when Harry (or James for that matter) would break down crying in their quarters, but that was happening less and less often. Before they knew it, it was September first, at dinnertime. The students who had just arrived on the train were walking into the Great Hall. Harry watched the tables fill up with returning students, mainly keeping his eyes on the Gryffindor table, where his mum and dad used to sit, and where one day he hoped to sit. He noticed one of the youngest Gryffindor students, a boy with red hair, pointing at him. Harry thought he was probably a second year since Harry knew the first years had yet to be sorted. Harry could barely make out that the boy was saying, “That’s Harry Potter!” Harry knew immediately that it made him uncomfortable. He watched as an older boy with red hair slapped the younger boy’s hand down, saying something. Harry wished that the Gryffindor table was closer to staff table so he could hear them.

While he was thinking this, he noticed that almost all the students had begun staring at him. His daddy had warned him that this might happen, but talking about it was a lot easier than watching it happen. He said, “Daddy, can we go?” desperately to his father.

James looked at the crowd, and then at his son. “Ok Harry, we’ll go now.” James got up, took his son who was on the verge of tears by the hand, and walked toward the door. As they were passing the Gryffindor table, the older redhead got up and walked up to them, dragging the younger one with him.

“Professor Potter,” said the boy, “My name’s Bill Weasley, and this is my little brother Charlie. He’d like to apologize for calling attention to Harry,” he then looked menacingly at Charlie, who appeared frightened, “Wouldn’t you Charlie?”

“Y-yes sir, P-Professor Potter, H-Harry Potter, I’m sorry,” the twelve-year old boy said with his head hung down.

James put his hand on Charlie's red head. "That's ok son. We forgive you. Isn't that right, Harry?"

"Y-Yes," said Harry.

They continued walking out of the hall. They didn't hear Professor Dumbledore address the whole hall. "I'm very disappointed in you all. Harry Potter is a scared five year old boy who watched his mother murdered in front of him less than a month ago. He is not an exhibit at the zoo. I am informing you now that from this moment on, anyone caught gawking at young Harry, or harassing him with questions about what happened that day, will lose ten points for their house, twenty if it's not their first offence. Hopefully I'll be able to convince Professor Potter, who for those of you who are unaware is our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, and Harry to come back to the Great Hall for breakfast and give us another chance."

-

James and Harry stopped by the kitchens to ask the house elves to bring some dinner to their quarters. When they arrived, they found that two small folding tables had been set up in the living room, one in front of the couch, and the other in front of the easy chair. Each of the tables had a tray of food. The two immediately tucked in to their meal. Shortly after they finished eating, the tables and leftovers disappeared. When that happened, James, who'd been sitting on the recliner, leaned back and got comfortable. "Harry," he said.

"Yes daddy," asked Harry.

"I'm afraid that you're going to have to deal with that your whole life. I know you don't like it, but what happened that day makes people curious about you. When your mum d-died for you, it put a protection over you that even Voldemort couldn't defeat. People think you defeated Voldemort, but it was your mum that did it. She's the real hero of our world. Her love for you vanquished that monster, but people are going to keep on looking at you and that scar."

"I hate that scar! It reminds me of mummy's death!" shouted Harry crying.

“That scar should remind you of how much your mother loves you!” said James firmly. “When people look at your scar, they’re really looking at how much your mum loves you.”

At that moment, there was a knock at the door. James pointed his wand at the door, and it opened, revealing Professor Dumbledore. “May I come in?” he asked.

“Sure professor, come on in,” said James.

“Hello Harry,” said Dumbledore, as he sat on the couch next to him.

“Hello Professor Dumbledore,” said Harry politely.

“On behalf of all the students at Hogwarts, I wish to apologize,” said Dumbledore. “I have informed the student body that you are not a display at the zoo, and that it is quite rude to stare at you as they were doing. I request that you give the students one more chance tomorrow, and join us for breakfast.”

Harry smiled at this apology. He said, “Daddy, should we go?”

James smiled at his son. “That’s up to you Harry. They were rude to you, not me.”

“Well,” said Harry, closing his eyes in concentration, “I would prefer to eat in the hall with everyone else, as long as they’re not pointing at me, so we’ll give them one more chance.”

“Splendid,” said Albus, getting up from his seat. “Then I must be going. It’s the first day of classes tomorrow, and I’ve got a ton of parchmentwork to do. Good Evening.”

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 4 – Sneaking Out

The next day, James and Harry went to breakfast in the Great Hall and sat by Alice and Neville Longbottom. True to Dumbledore's word, no one was staring at Harry, although Harry did notice a few people who seemed to be deliberately staring at the table to avoid looking at him. Harry thought to himself, "People not looking at me is better than being stared at," and said nothing about it. After breakfast, both Alice and James had classes to teach, so they left their kids together in the Potter quarters with a female house elf named Truby to watch them.

"Can't we go outside and play?" asked Neville, after they'd been inside for over an hour.

"Your parents is telling Truby you is to be staying inside this room, and inside this room is where Truby is having you staying."

"But it's such a nice day!" said Harry. "Don't our parents want us to have fun?"

"Your parents is wanting you to be having fun, but they is telling Truby not to be letting you out of the room," she said firmly. "You is supposed to be studying you lessons, isn't you?" She indicated a few muggle English books on a table they'd long since abandoned in favor of pacing around the room.

Harry looked outside and saw Charlie Weasley outside walking with a broomstick, and he right then decided he wanted to go outside and watch. He got an idea. He put on his best puppy-dog-eyes expression and asked, "Truby, I'm hungry. Could you go get me a treacle tart from the kitchen?"

"Could you get one for me, too?" said Neville sincerely.

"Ok," said the elf, "Truby is going to the kitchens and Truby is coming back with two treacle tarts," she said happily, and then snapped her fingers, disappearing.

Harry ran to the door and tried the handle, but it wouldn't turn.

"What are you doing?" asked a confused-looking Neville.

“Making a jailbreak!” Harry ran into his dad’s room and opened a dresser drawer he knew his dad kept his mum’s wand hidden in. He dug through the old clothes there and found the wand, and ran back to the door. He pointed it at the handle and said, “Er, aloha-mora,” and the door unlocked. Harry opened the door and ran out, followed quickly by Neville, who shut the door.

“Where’d you learn that spell?” asked Neville.

“I heard my dad use it once when mum had locked him out of their room.” Harry fought back his sadness and said, “Come on!”

They ran through the halls and down the staircases. Neville got his foot caught in one of the stairs, but Harry helped him quickly, and they made it outside of the castle. Neville said, “Ok Harry, we’re out. Wanna run to the lake?”

“No,” said Harry. “I saw Charlie out here with a broom,” he looked around and pointed, “that way.”

They ran in the direction Harry had pointed until they finally saw the quidditch pitch, and a small red-haired boy flying around on a broom. He noticed them and called out, “Hello Harry, Neville.”

“Hi,” the two boys said in unison.

Charlie landed near them and asked, “What are you two doing out here alone?” at which point both boys’ ears turned pink and they looked at the ground. Charlie smiled and changed the subject. “So, have either of you been on a real broom before?”

Neville shook his head, while Harry said, “My dad let me ride one with him a few times, until my mum caught him doing it.”

Charlie chuckled. “I’m practicing so I can make the quidditch team this year. I wanna be seeker.”

“Really?” said Harry smiling, “My dad was a seeker.”

Charlie looked around conspiratorially, “You want a flying lesson?”

Harry's face lit up, "Yeah!" he shouted excitedly while Neville shook his head furiously.

"Ok, just don't tell anyone." Charlie put his broom on the ground beside Harry. "Hold out your hand and say, 'up.'"

Harry did just that, and the broom went straight into his hand.

"Wow!" said Charlie, "You seem to be a natural."

Charlie continued the impromptu lesson and found that despite his age, Harry was a natural flyer. At first Charlie had made Harry fly with him on the broom, but after Harry begged enough, Charlie let Harry go off once for 'a short ride' by himself.

Harry was about fifty feet in the air when Charlie heard two voices behind him shout, "Harry, get down! Now!" Charlie turned to see two teachers, Professors Longbottom and Potter, both looking furious, along with a frantic house elf.

Harry, recognizing anger in his dad's voice, quickly landed nearby. He got off the broom as his daddy ran straight toward him and began lecturing him. Charlie grabbed his broom and attempted to slip away until he heard the potions professor say, "Charlie Weasley, where do you think you're going? Don't you know that five-year-olds shouldn't be on brooms! Harry could've fallen off! I suppose Neville was going to be your next student! Thirty points from Gryffindor for your serious lack of judgment! I ought to confiscate your broom permanently!"

"Please, Professor! I swear I'll never do it again! When you let class out early I decided to practice flying to try out for quidditch when they walked up and started watching! I know I shouldn't have let him ride the broom! Please give me another chance!"

Alice Longbottom took a deep breath. "Alright Mr. Weasley. I know you didn't mean any harm. If I'm correct, the quidditch tryouts will be next Wednesday."

"Yeah," said Charlie.

"Then I'm confiscating your broom until then. You can pick it up in my office that morning." Charlie's face fell. "Charlie, I doubt that a week of practice will make much difference with tryouts. Either you're good enough now or you're not."

"Yes ma'am," said Charlie, handing the professor his broom.

"Thank you Charlie. You may go."

As he was walking away, Professor Longbottom called out, "Since my ears are still recovering from the last Weasley howler, I won't tell your parents about this particular incident."

"Thanks," he shouted over his shoulder.

Alice then turned her attention on her son, who was looking at the ground with his hands in his pockets. "Neville, why did you leave the room when you know you shouldn't?"

"Er," said Neville, still looking at the ground, "Harry..."

"I didn't ask why Harry did. That's for your Uncle James to deal with. Harry didn't force you to leave, now did he?"

"N-No mum."

"Then why did you leave?"

"Er, it was boring in that room with nothing to do," said Neville.

"We left you some textbooks to study," she said with a smirk. "I know they're boring, but you've got to learn what's in them or you won't be ready to start taking classes here when you're old enough."

At that moment James voice was raised so that Alice and Neville heard his above their own. "I know that flying is fun, and that you were doing a good job of it, BUT YOU ARE NOT FLYING AGAIN UNTIL YOU'RE AT LEAST TEN YEARS OLD!"

They saw Harry deflate and start to cry, "Er, sorry dad. I didn't mean it."

James took Harry into a tight embrace, "I'm sorry I yelled like that, son. It's just when I saw you up there on that broom I was scared."

"You were scared I was gonna die like mommy."

"I guess so, Harry." Anxious to change the topic, and hopefully stop Harry's crying, James said, "How did you get out of our quarters anyway? I sealed that door myself."

Harry looked down nervously, and slowly pulled his mum's wand out of his back pocket and handed it to his father, who stared at it in disbelief. "Er, I did magic. I said, 'Aloha-mora' while pointing it at the door."

James fought the smile that was coming on his face. He muttered something like, "Little Marauder," and, "got to tell Padfoot and Moony," before looking at Harry and saying, "You shouldn't have done that. Now you're going to get punished."

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For a week, neither of the two boys saw the outside of the castle. Truby, who had suggested punishing herself by ironing her hands for negligence, was simply told not to leave the boys alone for anything while she was watching them. James had held Charlie back after their first class together. Charlie appeared very nervous.

"I didn't ask you to wait so I could hex you," said James cheerfully. "I simply wanted your version of how well my son was flying."

Charlie smiled, "I was impressed from the moment he got the broom in his hand. He only said, 'up,' once and it came straight to him. And then when he was flying, he was as natural as a bird! He was flying better than some professionals!"

James smiled broadly, "That's all I wanted to know. When he's old enough, I know he'll be a great quidditch player!"

"Yes, sir."

"You may go now. Good luck at the tryouts next week."

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 5 – Meet the Weasleys

The week seemed to pass by slowly, but eventually the punishments were over. Harry and Neville could go outside again (with one or both of their parents watching them) and Charlie got his broom back so he could try out for the team. At dinner that evening, he was thrilled to report to anyone who would listen that he made the team, even if he had to run to the staff table to do it.

“That’s great, Charlie!” said Harry excitedly. “I knew you’d make it! You’re the best flier in the world!”

“T-that’s terrific,” said Neville.

“Congratulations,” said James happily.

“Good job, Charlie,” said Alice.

“Thanks!” the young redhead said happily before running to the Gryffindor table.

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Time started to fly as the school year marched on. Less and less people seemed, ‘in awe’ of Harry, and he began feeling normal. Occasionally he’d have nightmares about his mum’s death, but that was certainly understandable, and his dad always did his best to comfort Harry. James took Harry to watch at least one quidditch practice per week. Occasionally Neville would join them, but he seemed to get scared watching others flying. Before they knew it, it was time for the first quidditch match of the year – Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw. James and Harry, along with Alice and Neville, were among the first people in the stands.

“I can’t wait for the game to start!” said an overly excited Harry. “I’ll bet Charlie flies better than anyone!”

James smiled to himself, “Well, I’m sure Charlie will do a fine job. Hopefully he’ll get the snitch. I don’t know anything about the Ravenclaw seeker.”

“Excuse us,” said a middle-aged man with red hair, “Do you mind if we join you.” He then indicated what appeared to be a whole troop of redheads. His wife, a red-haired slightly plump woman was leading a group of four small boys, two of which appeared to be twins, and one little girl.

“Not at all,” said James, “You’re the Weasleys, right? I believe I’ve seen you at some of Dumbledore’s order meetings.”

“That’s correct,” said the man, “Arthur Weasley, at your service. This is my wife, Molly, and our youngest children, Percy, Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny. I certainly know who you are, Mr. Potter. That must be Harry. Hello there.”

“Hello, sir,” said Harry shyly.

“This is Alice Longbottom and her son, Neville,” said James.

“Longbottom? Oh yes,” said Arthur. He sighed sadly and continued, “It’s good to meet all of you,” and shook James and Alice’s hands enthusiastically.

The Weasley kids sat down next to the other kids. Harry noticed the little girl stealing shy glances at him. Harry figured it was because of his fame, and wanted to put a stop to it, but knew he’d get in trouble if he was rude. He’d noticed that once people got to know him, they’d be less in awe of him, so he figured that he’d introduce himself to the girl. He went up to her and said, “Hello, my name is Harry. What’s yours?” as he extended his hand out to shake hands.

The girl’s face went redder than her hair. She slowly moved out her trembling hand toward Harry while muttering, “I-I’m G-Ginny.”

Harry shook her hand, and the youngest boy called out, “You shouldn’t have shaken my sister’s hand. Girls have cooties!”

“No they don’t,” said Harry, “My mum said that’s not true! I heard it before and asked her.”

“Of course she wouldn’t admit it. She’s a girl, too.”

“Are you calling my mummy a liar?” shouted Harry as he got up and walked toward the other boy, his fists clenched and a murderous look in his eyes.

Before he got to the boy, he felt arms around himself, holding him back, and Alice’s voice saying, “That’s not nice, Harry. You know you shouldn’t get in fights.”

“But he called mummy a liar!” he said, struggling against her.

“I know what he said, but we both know that’s not true. When you let something like that bother you, you’re actually making people think it is true and you’re mad that somebody found out.”

Before he could respond, he heard another female voice shout, “Ronald Weasley! How dare you pick a fight with Harry Potter, and how DARE you insult his mother! You are not going to play quidditch for the rest of the year, and you’ll be degnoming the back yard for a month!”

“But mummy, I didn’t know it was...” said the now tearful little boy.

“...and I don’t care if there are no gnomes there! You’ll have to go out and find gnomes, bring them into the yard, and then remove them! Now you go and apologize right now or it’ll be two months!”

The red-haired boy put his head down and walked toward Harry. “S-Sorry,” he said, “I-I didn’t know it was you.”

“So it would be alright to insult my mummy if I weren’t famous!” said Harry coldly. “How would you like me to insult your mummy?”

Ron’s face reddened. “Er, no, I guess not. I’m s-sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything about your mummy.”

“Er, I guess I’ll forgive you, but don’t talk about my mum again.” Ron nodded. “You’re Charlie’s family, right?”

Ron’s face brightened, “Yeah! He was practicing all summer so he can be seeker! I wasn’t surprised he made the team! He says you’re a good flyer, too.”

Harry looked sad, "Yeah, but now Daddy says I can't fly until I'm ten. I'm only five now."

"That's too bad," said Ron. "I'm five too, and my mum won't let me fly either. Ginny is four, and Fred and George are both seven."

"Where do you live?" asked Harry.

Ron excitedly answered, "Our house is called the Burrow, and it's just about held together by magic! It's really neat. And we've got a quidditch pitch, which I can't use yet, and a pond we can swim in! It's lots of fun! You should come to visit..."

At that moment, the game began, and Harry was amazed at how fast Ron's attention shifted to the game. The Ravenclaw chasers were clearly better than Gryffindor's, and the score was two hundred ten to one hundred, in favor of Ravenclaw, until Charlie made a spectacular dive, catching the snitch and winning the game. Harry greatly enjoyed watching the match, and found that he wished he were out there playing. He cheered with everyone else as Charlie got the snitch, and he watched as the rest of the team carried him to the locker room on their shoulders.

Before they left the stand, Ron asked, "So Harry, would you like to visit the Burrow?"

Harry thought for a few seconds, "If Neville can come too."

Ron smiled, "Sure, the more the merrier. Let's ask our parents!"

While Ron was talking to his mother, Harry got Neville and walked up to James and Alice. "Can we go? I mean if Mrs. Weasley says we can, can we?"

Alice and James chuckled. Alice said, "Can you what?"

"Visit the Weasleys!" said Harry, excitedly.

James smiled, "If it's alright with them, it's fine with me. It'll probably be good for you to be around kids your age. Harry, you can go."

“So can you, Neville,” said Alice.

At that moment, Mrs. Weasley walked up to James and Alice. “Ronald has suggested that Harry and Neville visit the Burrow. We would love to have them, but I wanted to know if it was alright with you.”

“Yes, we were just talking about it,” said James.

“It’s fine with us, as long as it’s not too much trouble for you,” said Alice.

“It’s no trouble at all,” said Arthur, who had joined in the conversation.

“What day should we send them over?” asked James.

“Actually,” said Mrs. Weasley, “I was thinking of having them coming over Friday night and staying for a few days, if that’s alright with you.”

“Days?” asked Alice.

“I think it might be fun for them to spend a few days away from home,” said Molly.

“How many days were you thinking about?” asked James.

“I was thinking about having them leave Monday morning,” said Mrs. Weasley. “It should give them plenty of time to enjoy the pond before it gets too cold outside. Plus, it might be a nice break for you two.”

“Neville, Harry,” called Alice. They walked up with eager looks on their faces. Alice continued, “Would you like to spend next weekend with the Weasleys? It’ll be like a short Holiday.”

Neville immediately said, “Yeah,” with a big grin on his face.

Harry looked a bit nervous when he heard the word, ‘weekend,’ so James said, “You don’t have to if you don’t feel up to it.”

Harry appeared to be thinking hard. Finally he said, “I would like to. I can’t wait!”

James smiled and put his hand on Harry's head. Then he said to Molly and Arthur, "Just make sure that they can't get a hold of any brooms. About a month ago, one of the students let Harry borrow his after he and Neville had snuck out."

Mrs. Weasley sighed, "What kind of stupid, irresponsible student would do such a thing?"

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 6 – Weekend at the Weasleys

“The Burrow,” shouted Harry, as he threw floo powder down into Professor Dumbledore’s fireplace. He had just said goodbye to his father, and was leaving for his weekend with the Weasleys.

He arrived at the house of redheads, and immediately saw Ron and Ginny standing in front of him. Behind them were Mrs. Weasley, Percy, Fred, and George. “Hello,” Harry said politely.

“Hello, Harry,” said Mrs. Weasley merrily.

Percy said, “It is good to see you, Harry.”

“Yes, quite spiffing,” said George.

“Yes indeed,” said Fred.

“Hey Harry,” said Ron and Ginny at the same time. Ron shot a quick glare at his sister, and then said, “Harry, you wanna play outside?”

“Yeah,” said an excited Harry.

“Me, too,” said Neville, who’d just arrived.

“All right, boys,” said Molly, “Just be back in time for lunch, and stay in the backyard!”

They played around the backyard about an hour before Ginny came outside. “What are you doing here, Ginny,” shouted Ron, angry at the interruption.

“I thought we could go flying for a while.”

“Flying?” exclaimed Ron. “We can’t get into the broom shed. Mum locked it.”

Ginny pulled a wand out of her back pocket and said with an evil grin, “I think I can do something about that.”

“You nicked Mum’s wand?” said Ron.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Neville, "Harry got in trouble for doing the same thing before."

"I'll return it before she misses it," Ginny proclaimed. "I heard you like flying, Harry."

"Love it!" said Harry excitedly.

"Let's go," said Ron.

"Fine, but I'm not flying!" said Neville.

They quickly ran to the broom shed and Ginny unlocked the door with the wand. After they grabbed the three best brooms they could find, Ginny snuck back in the house to return the wand. About two minutes later, the girl came back out, grinning broadly. "Success!" she said.

A few minutes later, Harry, Ron, and Ginny were flying around happily while Neville was sitting on the ground watching. Harry was the best flier of them, but the youngest Weasleys weren't bad either. "Weeeee," shouted little Harry as he dove toward the ground and pulled up just a few feet above the ground.

"Oh yeah," laughed Ginny, "Watch this!" She started flying loops around her brother.

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While the kids were impressing each other with their flying abilities, James was sitting at his desk in his quarters, grading papers. He was glad he didn't have any classes on Fridays, but he didn't feel like grading right now. It seemed weird to not have Harry bothering him every five minutes with a question. He decided to go outside and take a walk by the lake. As he approached the lake, he noticed a familiar person standing by the lake, skipping rocks. He smiled to himself and thought, 'She looks beautiful,' and then shook his head, saying to himself, 'Where'd that come from?'

He snuck up from behind on Alice, scaring her by saying, "Hello," from about a foot away from her.

She jumped and turned around, breathing a bit heavily as she smiled. "James, you startled me."

He grinned and shrugged his shoulders. "I guess you're bored, too, huh?"

"I guess so. You never realize how much of a part of you they are until they're not with you. I don't know how parents manage to send their kids here for most of the year."

"I don't know," said James, "Maybe it's easier when they're older. I wouldn't know." He then took a deep breath and said, "You want to take a walk?"

"Sure."

James and Alice started walking side-by-side around the lake. At one point, James realized they were holding hands, although he had no memory of taking hers. He was trying to figure out a polite way to let go of her hand, when he heard a familiar happy voice call from behind them.

"ello Professor Longbottom, Professor Potter," called Hagrid.

James let go of Alice's hand, reaching out to shake Hagrid's. "Please, Hagrid, it's James. It's bad enough having the kids calling me professor."

"That goes for me, too," said Alice.

James turned to her in mock confusion. "You want Hagrid to start calling you James?"

She chuckled, "Only if he starts calling you Alice."

"Well," said Hagrid happily, "James, Alice, and I'm not saying which 'a yer I'm referrin' to, I got to get back to me groundskeepin.'" With that said, he walked off toward the forbidden forest.

James and Alice continued on their walk, and before he knew it, they were holding hands again. In shock over this development, he

dropped her hand immediately, earning a strange look from Alice. "James, what's wrong?"

"What's wrong is that Lily's been dead only a few months and I'm holding hands with another woman," he said frustrated. She looked a bit apprehensive. "Alice, I'm not mad at you, I'm mad at me. You've been such a good friend since Harry and I arrived. Not just to me, but to Harry as well. I don't know. I just have started..." He took a deep breath. "Maybe I should go."

"James, wait," Alice said as he turned around and started walking toward the castle.

"I've got parchments to grade. I'll see you at lunch," he called without looking back.

"James Potter, come back here! Don't make me use my wand!" shouted Alice.

James stopped and turned around. He said, "I don't know if..."

"James," she interrupted, "I think we need to talk about this. You love Lily and miss her, and you feel guilty that you may be starting to develop feelings for me." His head was facing the ground, and he was completely quiet. "Tell me I'm wrong," she said defiantly.

"You're...er, not wrong," mumbled James so that she could barely hear him.

"I think I'm developing feelings for you as well," said Alice quietly.

James looked up at her. "You are?"

"Yes, I am," she said confidently. "I haven't begun to feel this way since, since Frank died, but yes I am now. The question is this. What are we going to do about it?"

James took a few deep breaths before looking into her eyes and saying, "I don't know. I've got to think about it."

She sighed, "I understand, James. I've had a lot more time than you have. I'm not gonna push you, and we can move slowly if you decide to do something about our feelings." She gently took his hand in hers and looked straight into his eyes. "Lily would want you to be happy, James."

James smiled at her. "You are a very understanding woman. I'm not gonna keep you waiting for an answer for long. I promise I'll have an answer before Harry and Neville are back."

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"Don't you think you're a little too high, Harry?" shouted Neville.

"No, Neville," shouted Harry as he looked toward his best friend. "This is really fun! You should've taken a broom. Watch this!" Without looking ahead he started moving as fast as the broom he was on could take him. When he finally turned his head, it was too late.

He'd crashed right into Ginny, who'd been crossing in front of him. She fell off her broom and Harry immediately dove after her, saying, "Oh my God! Ginny!" All he could think about was that he didn't want to see someone else die because of him. He managed to grab her hand about ten feet above the ground, but her weight was pulling him off his broom. "Ron, help!" Harry shouted while he had one hand holding tightly to the broom he was riding and the other hand grasped just as tightly around Ginny's hand. He felt himself slipping off the broom until Ron got there and grabbed Ginny's other hand. Together they took her down to the ground.

Neville ran toward them shouting, "Are you ok?"

Ginny was pale, shaking, and crying. "I-I'm ok," she said quietly.

Harry was also crying. He said, "Ginny, I'm sooo sorry! I d-didn't mean it! P-Please forgive me! D-Daddy told me not to fly! I'm so stupid! It was all my fault! Just like when mummy died!" He then ran off in the direction of the house.

He didn't hear Ginny whisper, "I-It's all right, you saved me."

-

Mrs. Weasley was just walking outside to call the children for lunch when she saw a very distressed boy with raven hair run behind her broom shed. She distinctly heard sobbing coming from the boy. She walked up to where he was and saw that he was sitting on the ground with his head resting on his knees. His arms were around his head and knees.

"Harry," said Mrs. Weasley, "What's wrong?"

He looked up, and she could see his red face had a trail of tears falling down both cheeks. "It's all my fault! I was bad! You prob'ly should send me home."

She walked up to the obviously scared little boy, squatted down in front of him, and pulled him into a hug. He started crying on her shoulders. "Now, now, it can't be that bad. Tell me what happened."

"Gi, I, got brooms out of the shed and we were flying, all but Neville, and I ran into Ginny and knocked her off her broom."

"Is she all right?" Molly asked hurriedly as she stiffened up.

"Y-yes. I-I caught her, but she could've died and it would've been my fault just like mummy!" He started crying again.

She looked at the small boy crying into her shoulder. "Your fault? Surely no ones said that."

"They don't have to. I know! I wouldn't be quiet when the bad man was talking to mummy and daddy! That's why he tried to kill me and mummy jumped in front of me!"

Molly found tears forming in her own eyes. "Harry, listen to me. It's nobody's fault but that bad man's! Your mummy did what she did because she loved you. I would do the same for any of my children. She wanted you to live and be happy."

-

James was back at his desk, making himself concentrate on grading assignments. He thought that if he got that done, he'd be free to think. Unfortunately he was very distracted. He kept hearing Alice's voice saying, 'Lily would want you to be happy, James,' followed by his own voice saying, 'She would want us to go on living, and to be happy,' as he'd told Harry when they moved to this castle. He felt guilty for holding Alice's hand and guilty for just having those kind of thoughts about her. He looked down at the wedding ring he was still wearing and tried to think about what Lily would want. He'd been sure when he'd told Harry she'd want them happy, but he just didn't know how she'd feel now. He shook his head. 'She wouldn't expect me to spend my whole life lonely,' he told himself, 'She loved me too much for that. The question is if I'm ready.' He took a deep breath. 'Alice is a wonderful woman. She cares about Harry, and Harry likes her. I doubt I'll ever find anyone better than her. She said we can go slowly, and I definitely will have to if I get into a relationship with her. I'd have to get over my guilty feeling. If I keep her waiting, she'll end up marrying someone else the day before I finally decide I'm ready to date.' His mind made up, he got up from his chair and left the room.

He paused for a moment, considering backing out, but decided to knock on the door in front of him. It opened to reveal Alice. She smiled warmly at him as she said, "Come in."

James said, "Thank you," and walked to the couch and sat down. He said, "I-I've been thinking about the talk we had earlier today."

"Oh," said Alice, as she sat down on a nearby chair.

"Yeah." James took a deep breath. "I came to a few conclusions. The first is that you are a very wonderful person."

"Thank you."

James smiled. "The second is that Lily would want me happy." He paused and said, "You definitely make me happy." He paused yet again. "I don't think I'll ever feel completely ready to date again, even if I wait thirty years. It'll be hard to get used to the idea of being with someone besides Lily. Y-you said that you were willing to take it slow." He sighed. "You'll need to be patient if you'll have me, but I

know that I do want to pursue our feelings. I guess I'm asking if you'll be my girlfriend."

"Well," Alice said seriously, as though solving a particularly difficult problem, "I suppose we can try out that experiment." She got up and sat next to him on the couch, and put her arm around his shoulder.

-

Meanwhile, back at the Burrow, Mrs. Weasley was walking little Harry, whose tears had been wiped away by the Weasley matriarch, into the house to find all the other children had finished eating the sandwiches she'd placed on the table before going outside. She noticed that the three youngest children there were acting very somber. She said, "I understand that Ron, Harry, and Ginny went flying today, and that you had an accident which nearly killed Ginny."

Ron scowled for a moment at Harry, mouthing the words, 'Tattle-Tale' while Ginny put her head down and said, "Yes, mum."

"Harry has claimed that he is the one who took the brooms out of the shed. Is that true?"

Ginny looked up at Harry, whose head was down, and said, "No mum. I took them. It was my idea."

Molly smiled. "Thank you, Ginny. The question is, what should I do about it." She looked around at the sad children and made up her mind. "Has each of you learned a lesson from this?"

"Yes, Mrs. Weasley," said Harry.

"Yes, Mum," said both Ginny and Ron.

"I believe that what happened today will probably be a better lesson than any punishment I could ever give out. Just this once, there will be no punishment. But if I catch any of you sneaking brooms again, the punishment will be very severe. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Harry and Neville while at the same moment Ron and Ginny said,

“Yes, mum.”

Fred said, “No fair,”

“If we’d...” said George.

“If one of you had nearly fallen to your death, I’d have probably not punished you.”

-

The next few days went a lot more smoothly. Harry and Neville were staying in Bill and Charlie’s room. They got to go swimming in the pond a few times, as well as play muggle games Mr. Weasley had learned about such as tag and hide-and-go-seek. Monday morning came all too fast for the kids, and before they knew it, they were flooing back to Dumbledore’s office at Hogwarts. Harry immediately noticed that his father was holding Aunt Alice’s hand the way he used to hold his mum’s hand. He stared at the hands, not knowing what to think. Neville arrived with Harry barely noticing.

James noticed his son’s staring and said, “Boys, we should probably let you know...”

Alice continued, “We’re, er dating.”

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 7 – The Unexpected

“What does that mean, daddy?” asked Harry. “Why are you holding Aunt Alice’s hand like you used to hold Mummy’s?”

James looked nervously from Harry to Alice, trying to figure out what to say.

Neville said, “I know what that means. Some of the other kids had this happen to their families. Uncle James and Mummy are thinking of making us one family, with them as our parents, and us as brothers.”

Harry looked pale. He turned to his father and said, “Is that true, daddy?”

James sighed. “Er, we haven’t gotten to that stage yet. We’ve just started dating...”

“Then it is true?” Harry’s face started to turn red, and his eyes narrowed. “YOU WANT TO REPLACE MUMMY! THAT’S IMPOSSIBLE! SHE WAS THE BESTEST, PRETTIEST, NICEST MUMMY IN THE WHOLE WORLD! AUNT ALICE ISN’T ANYTHING LIKE HER! HOW CAN YOU EVEN THINK ABOUT THAT DADDY? I THOUGHT YOU LOVED MUMMY!” Tears were forming in little Harry’s eyes. He quickly ran out the door.

James went to follow, but Alice stopped him. “I think I’ll have to talk to him James. But first I need to ask this. Neville, how do you feel about this?”

Neville looked down. “I love daddy and I miss him, but he’s not coming back. I like Uncle James and Harry. I suppose if I can’t have daddy back, I wouldn’t mind having them.”

Alice smiled at her son. “Thank you, Neville. You should know that, at least for the time being, we’re not getting married. We’re just keeping each other company.”

Neville answered. “Maybe for now. But I seen how you’ve been keeping each other company all the time like you was family. That’s just what the other kids said happened before they became a family.”

Both James and Alice blushed slightly. Alice said. "Maybe. We'll see. For now I need to talk to Harry. James, would you walk Neville to your quarters and stay with him?"

James said, "Well, I can certainly bring him to my room, but I have a class to teach in ten minutes, and so do you."

"Of course," said Alice. "Take Neville to your room and have Truby watch him. Then put a note on my door for the students to come back in a half hour. I'd let them in the room, except that unsupervised first-years and the potions classroom don't go together. I'll take Harry to your room."

-

About ten minutes later, Alice was walking around the lake, and spotted a small raven haired boy sitting in front of a tree. As she approached, she noticed that he was still crying. She walked behind him without him noticing until she sat next to him. He jumped and started to get up until she said, "Harry, please stay here? We need to talk."

Begrudgingly, he sat back down with his arms crossed in front of him. He looked at her coldly, not speaking.

Alice took a deep breath and began. "Harry, your mum was a wonderful person. She was my friend for..."

"Don't pretend you liked my mummy! You want to replace her!"

"Harry, your mum would be ashamed of the way you just interrupted me," she said calmly. "Am I right?"

Harry sniffed a little and put his head down. "Yes Aunt Alice."

She sighed. "Like I was saying, your mum and I were very close friends for a very long time, and I know what a fantastic person she was, and how much she loved you and your father. I am not trying to replace her. I know that both you and your father will always love her just like Neville and I will always love your Uncle Frank. But that doesn't mean that we can't also love each other. Harry, your dad and

I just started dating, and at this point we don't know if we'll end up as a family or not. But if one day your dad does want to make me, or anyone else, part of your family, you need to be willing to give them a chance. I always thought we were friends."

"We, we are," said Harry.

"Then why were you upset that your dad and I are getting closer?"

Harry sobbed a bit. "I-It's not that it's you. It's just...I miss mummy so much," he started crying, "and I don't want to forget her or pretend she didn't exist."

"Me, too." She embraced Harry and he hugged her back. A few tears started falling down her cheeks. They stayed like that for a few minutes until Harry stopped crying. Alice then asked, "Are you ready to go back in the castle? I've got a class to teach."

He muttered, "If we have to," and the two of them got up and walked hand in hand toward the castle."

-

The weeks passed quickly, with Neville and Harry getting in the habit of spending every other weekend with their new friends, the Weasleys. Ginny seemed to have developed a huge crush on Harry, which Mr. and Mrs. Weasley found amusing. She always wanted to talk and play with Harry. Ron seemed to like Harry a bit more since he tried to take the blame for 'borrowing' the brooms, so they were slowly becoming friends. Molly never told James or Alice about the broom-riding incident of their first visit, but she did get an enchanted lock to secure the broom shed better. These weekends gave James and Alice more time to spend together, which they greatly enjoyed.

-

James had been thinking more and more about the prophecy, and was wondering if there were anything he could do to prepare Harry. In late November, James asked if he could have a talk with Dumbledore at his earliest convenience. Now he was standing outside the headmaster's door.

“Enter,” came the headmaster’s voice from the other side of the door.

After James opened the door, he looked around, and was happy to see Fawkes in his usual perch on Dumbledore’s desk. He was ushered into a chair and offered a lemon drop. “No thanks,” said James. “I came about Harry. The prophecy. I was wondering if there’s anything I can do now to help prepare Harry.”

Dumbledore sighed, “I do not think it would be best to turn his childhood into auror training, James.”

James’ ears got a bit pink. “I don’t mean to put him through auror boot camp, sir, but I was wondering what specific skills you think would be good to train him with. You’ve fought Voldemort before.”

“I have,” said Dumbledore grimly. “I can honestly say that his greatest weakness is his arrogance. If he underestimates his opponent, he will not be as careful as he should be. If you insist on training him, I suggest you consult a book on what children his age can handle before you begin. I suppose a little extra preparation won’t hurt. That way when the time comes, he’ll surprise Voldemort.”

“What I’d like to know is why that monster didn’t simply die when that curse bounced back on him. We all saw some sort of spirit or something flee. Do you have any idea why that happened?”

Dumbledore sighed. “I do have a theory, but please remember that it is just a theory.”

“Let’s hear it,” said James, sounding very interested.

“I believe that he has created a horcrux, possibly more than one.”

James looked shocked. His face was white. “A-A horcrux? I’ve heard about those, but I never thought...I suppose he didn’t have any problem killing people to make them.”

“I’m afraid he didn’t,” said Dumbledore. “Mind you, it’s all speculation, but if I’m correct, they’ll all have to be destroyed before he can die.”

“Assuming you’re right, how would you go about finding his horcrux or horcruxes?”

“I do have a few theories about where he might hide them,” said Dumbledore.

“Then why don’t you check those places?” said James, “The worst that could happen is a wasted trip.”

Dumbledore sighed, “I suppose I could do that. I guess I don’t need actual proof before visiting a few of those locations. I may actually find the proof at one of those places. It would be advantageous to destroy them now before he comes back. Then Harry’s only task will be dueling Voldemort, not hunting down horcruxes. I will look into this matter, James, and keep you apprised.”

“Thank you, sir.”

-

Before they knew it, the Christmas holidays were upon them. The Potters and the Longbottoms decided to spend them together. They were going to spend the time vacationing in muggle Paris. They had reservations for two rooms (one for the Potters and one for the Longbottoms) at an expensive hotel for two weeks. They took a muggle train there, which the kids first thought was interesting, until they got bored after twenty minutes. Harry complained, “We should’ve taken the Knight Bus! That’s a fun ride!”

They checked into the hotel and put their luggage in their rooms. Alice said, “Why don’t we look at the mall across the street and see if we can find some good muggle souvenirs?”

Harry said, “I’d like to get some muggle stuff for Mr. Weasley. He’s always talking about them.”

The four of them walked hand-in-hand across the street, with the parents on the outside holding their child’s hand, while the two boys held each others hands as they all ran across the street when it was safe. Alice said, “I’d like to go to the bookstore and see if they have a book on this city, maybe with a map. While I’m there, I’ll see if they’ve

got a book on the muggle science called chemistry. I've heard that it's similar to potions."

As they entered the store, they saw a woman struggling with her little girl, who apparently didn't want to leave the bookstore.

"But I want that book!" screamed the girl with bushy brown hair and buckteeth, causing everybody to turn toward them.

"But that book on physics is for college students!" shouted the mother, who was clearly getting aggravated with her daughter. "We're going back to the hotel until you...What?"

At that moment, in front of about twenty muggles, one of the bookshelves started moving toward the girl by itself.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 8 – Meet the Grangers

James and Alice's countenances changed as they each grabbed their wands, their ministry training taking over. James said, "Alice, secure the room. I'll take care of the bookshelf."

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As Harry watched, Aunt Alice pointed her wand at the doorway, causing it to glow orange for a second. His daddy pointed his wand at the moving bookshelf, causing it to move back where it belongs. Harry noticed the now scared girl start crying while her mummy was holding her. He saw his daddy and Aunt Alice walking around to everybody in the store and pointing their wands at their heads. He and Neville were left alone, so Harry decided to walk up to the little girl and introduce himself.

"Hello, my name's Harry," he said, reaching out his little hand toward the crying girl.

-

She blinked, wondering who this boy was. She'd noticed that the adults he'd walked in with, probably his parents, had taken over the situation and were pointing sticks at everybody's heads. This was the strangest thing that had ever happened to her. She had no idea how that shelf had moved, yet instinctively, she knew that she'd moved it. It was like magic from those fantasy stories she'd read at her mum's insistence. She decided that the best thing to do was be polite and talk to the raven-haired boy, trying to learn everything she could about what was going on. She reached out her hand and shook his.

"Hi. My name's Hermione." If he wanted to know her last name, he'd have to say his.

Harry smiled. "That's a pretty name." The girl blushed.

"Do you know what's going on here?" asked Hermione.

Harry nodded. "Yup. You did magic and you're not allowed. I hope they don't have to put you in Ezcapiin for it. I heard they got horrible guards there that make you sad all da time."

Hermione blinked again, hardly believing what she was hearing. "I...I did magic? You mean it's real?"

Harry nodded again, and his hair moved revealing a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. Hermione noted to ask him about it later. She hoped that all magical people didn't have to get that scar tattooed on their heads. "Magic is real. Don't you know?" Hermione merely shook her head. "Oh," Harry said, "Your folks must be muggles. Is this your first accidental magic?"

She shook her head at this boy's ignorance of simple English. "If you mean, 'accidental magic,' then yes, I've never, well maybe, that wasn't explained, well..." she trailed off as memories of unexplained occurrences flooded her mind. "It's the first time anyone told me what it was. What did you call my parents? What's a muggle?"

"A person who can't do magic," he said simply. "Dad says not many people can do magic. It's a special gift, and we're lucky to have it."

If Hermione was having trouble taking this all in, her mom was having more trouble as she listened silently. She didn't have a clue what was going on, but she decided she'd speak to the adults when they came here. In the meantime, she'd listen to what the child had to say.

Hermione's eyebrows came together while her brow furrowed as she thought about what she'd been told. "You said I might be taken someplace. Am I in trouble?"

Harry nodded. "Big trouble. Kids aren't allowed to do magic except at Hogwarts School so that was bad. And no one's allowed to do magic in front of muggles, so that's also bad. But I think they only put real bad folks who hurt people in Ezcapiin Prison, not kids who accidental-ly did magic. At least I hope so. You seem nice, and smart."

She blushed at the compliment. "Thanks. Are you sure it's called Ezcapiin Prison? That sounds a lot like escaping prison."

“Actually,” said James, who’d walked up behind Harry, “It’s pronounced Azkaban Prison, but they’d never put a cute little girl like you in there, Miss...”

“Granger, sir. Hermione Granger.”

“Well,” said James, squatting down to look her in the eyes and shake her hand, “It’s good to meet you. My name is James Potter, and this is my son Harry. Is that your mummy?”

“Yes, Mr. Potter.”

James stood up and faced Mrs. Granger. “Hello. I had to make sure you were her mother. Otherwise I’d have had to erase your memory of this incident like we did the other store patrons. Can we go somewhere to talk more privately? Is Hermione’s father anywhere around? This concerns him as well.”

“My husband is in our room at the hotel. I guess we can all go there to talk about this. From what your son has been saying, I have a lot of questions.”

-

“I can’t believe it!” said Mr. Granger after watching James levitate the television in their hotel room (which was on the same floor as the ones the Potters and Longbottoms were staying at). “This defies all the laws of physics that I had to memorize in college.”

Alice smiled. “Your muggle laws of physics really don’t apply to magic. Your daughter has a rare and wonderful gift. That gift will have to be kept secret. Hermione, you’ll have to stop yourself from losing your temper. That’s what causes accidental magic. When you’re eleven, you’ll get your Hogwarts letter, and then you’ll learn how to use magic.”

Hermione looked disappointed. “But I’d like to learn some magic before then.”

James said, “I don’t know where you live, but if it’s near London you could visit Diagon Alley and buy books and things like that, maybe

even an owl. I'm sure Harry will want to write you. Neville too, probably, but he's a bit shy around strangers. Harry doesn't have that problem."

Hermione's eyes lit up at the mention of books on magic. "Can we go there when we get back home, mummy, daddy?"

Her mother chuckled. "If we say no, we'll probably have another bit of accidental magic. Of course we will. I'd like to find out what I can about the magical world myself. Where exactly is this Diagon Alley located?"

James gave them the directions, including the fact that they'd only see the Leaky Cauldron if they were touching Hermione since it's charmed so muggles can't see it. He told them about Tom the innkeeper and the wall that opens in the alley. He even gave them a warning not to go into Knockturn Alley.

When he was done, Hermione said, "Harry mentioned that you can do magic at Hogwarts. Does that include kids my age?"

James ears turned pink. "Er, technically yes. Harry has done a few spells there to get into trouble." Both Mr. and Mrs. Granger chuckled at that statement, obviously imagining what kind of mischief a magical kid could get into.

"And both you and Professor Longbottom teach at that school?"

"Yes, that's true dear," said Alice. James didn't like the direction this conversation was going.

"Then could I visit you sometimes and practice magic?" she said, giving them the biggest, saddest puppy-dog-eyes that any little girl has ever given in all of human history.

Harry, who was supposed to be watching the television (which had been set back down) with Neville, shouted, "Yeah! Can she dad? Can she, Aunt Alice?" adding his own puppy-dog eyes to the argument.

James took a deep breath. "I've been planning on buying an extra wand, cause Ollivander won't sell one to someone younger than

eleven, and starting to give Harry weekly magic lessons on Saturdays starting next term. I was gonna ask Alice and Neville about him joining my little class. I don't suppose it would hurt to include you in them if you want. Once we're ready to start that, all you'll need to do is get her to the Leaky Cauldron and she'll be able to floo, that's a magical type of transportation, directly to my office at Hogwarts."

Hermione was practically jumping up and down in excitement. "Oh can I, can I, please! You don't want me to be behind all those kids from magical families, do you?"

Mr. Granger chuckled. "You've made my daughter very happy by giving her something else to study. I suppose we can do that."

"Oh thank you, thank you, thank you daddy!" she said hugging her father tightly.

"We'll owl you with the details. And I honestly do strongly suggest that you get an owl when you visit Diagon Alley. I'm afraid we're running a bit behind schedule. We've got some sightseeing to do."

"Actually," said Mrs. Granger, "We planned on sightseeing as well. We just arrived here and Hermione had to see the tourist bookstore where all the books are English before anything else. We'd love it if you'd join us, wouldn't we?"

"Yes!" said Hermione happily.

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As it turned out, the Grangers were even planning on leaving the same day as the others. They adjusted their plans to match and spent most of the vacation together. Hermione did make friends with Neville once he started talking to her. Hermione never had the chance to ask Harry about his scar because they kept way too busy seeing all the sights Paris had to offer and talking about magic in general. She did find out that Harry's mum was dead, but had better manners than to ask for details about that. Neville told Hermione about some interesting magical plants that she found absolutely fascinating. Harry told her about flying on a broomstick which made Hermione a bit nervous. Upon seeing her face, Harry said, "I know

we're too little. I accidentally hit one of my bestest friends off a broom but caught her before she hit the ground. That was scary! That's the last time I flew. Don't tell my daddy about it. He doesn't know. It happened at the Burrow, where the Weasleys live. But, except for that, flying is the funnest thing in the world!"

-

The day after the Grangers got back home, they found Hermione practically dragging them to Diagon Alley. Following James' advice, they first went to Gringotts and exchanged a fair amount of muggle money for Galleons, and then accepted the inevitable trip to the bookstore where Hermione got every first-year student book, as well as 'Hogwarts, a History' and the brand new edition of , 'Modern Magical History.' They went from there to Madam Malkin's Robes and got Hermione some genuine witch's robes, and decided to get one set of their own so that they could walk around this area incognito. James had warned them that there are a few people, the vast minority, who are prejudiced against muggles and muggleborn wizards and witches, so they thought it would be best to blend in rather than invite trouble just in case one of those bigots was watching. They then went to the pet store and picked out an owl. Hermione wanted a kitten as well, but her father said, "We'll see how well you take care of your owl. Maybe, based off of that, you'll get a kitten for your birthday."

"But that's not til September!" said Hermione pouting.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Granger, "That gives you plenty of time to show us how well you take care of your pets."

They then allowed Hermione to have an ice cream cone at Fortesque's, but didn't even take her into the magical candy store.

-

That night, Hermione was excited to have all those magical things. She immediately sent her owl, who she named Einstein, with a letter to her new friend Harry. She decided to read 'Modern Magical History.' She was enjoying the book thoroughly until she came upon the last chapter. It was called, 'Harry Potter: The Boy Who Lived.'

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 9 – Making Friends and Learning Magic

By the time little Hermione had finished reading the chapter about her new friend, she was crying. She couldn't believe that Harry had watched his mummy killed in front of him less than six months ago. She had learned how he had gotten his unusual scar, and how his mother had died. She was so absorbed with this information that she didn't notice the knocking on her door until it opened, revealing her mum.

"Hermione," she said softly, "I could hear you crying outside your door. What's wrong?"

The small child sobbed, "Harry," and handed her mum the book, opened to the page where the chapter began.

She took the book from her daughter, a bit confused about what one of her new books had to do with Harry. Her eyes went wide when she read the title, 'Harry Potter: The Boy Who Lived.' "Harry's in this book?" she said. She sat on the bed with Hermione and put a consoling arm around her daughter as she read the story of how Harry Potter had vanquished You-Know-Who. When she was through, she placed the book on a nightstand. "Wow. That must have been a terrible thing for him and Mr. Potter to go through. I'm glad they seem to be recovered from it. I think that probably has a lot to do with Neville and Professor Longbottom."

"It's just so...sad how his mummy died," sobbed Hermione. "I don't know what I'd do if you were killed like that. I should ask him about it. He..."

"Now you wait just a minute, young lady. I don't think you should even mention it to Harry! I'm sure he doesn't want to think about that. He's probably got enough people gawping at him if he's as famous in his world as that book says. I think you should pretend you never read that unless he brings it up."

"Yes mum."

The next day, the Grangers had gotten a reply from Harry and his father. They'd set a date for James' first pre-Hogwarts class for the first Saturday morning after term started. Harry had mentioned that he was a bit disappointed that he couldn't go to the Burrow until Saturday afternoons instead of Friday nights on the weekends that he spent with them, but was excited that his dad was letting him use a wand. Before they knew it, Hermione was flooing to 'Hogwarts: Professor Potter's Office' for her first ever magic class.

She emerged from the fireplace and immediately fell to the floor. She thought to herself that this was a thoroughly unpleasant way to travel, even though it was fast.

"Hello Hermione," called out James, Alice, Neville, and Harry at once.

She dusted herself off while getting up. "Hi Professor Potter, Professor Longbottom, Harry, and Neville," she said politely as she looked around the office in fascination. She naturally saw a bookshelf full of defense books. She also saw all kinds of devices that she couldn't identify as she visually inspected the room. Her eyes landed on a moving photograph on the desk of Professor Potter, Harry, and an attractive red-haired woman with green eyes just like Harry's. They were standing behind a cake that said, 'Happy Birthday Harry' and had five candles on it. She nearly started crying when she realized that it had been taken less than a month before Lily Potter died.

James noticed her staring at the photo. "That was taken at Harry's fifth birthday party. Hopefully you'll be at his sixth."

Hermione smiled and said, "I'd love to," glad to avoid the topic of Harry's mum.

"I guess we should get started on the lessons then," said Alice.

"Right you are, Professor," said James happily, "Follow me."

"Lead the way, Professor," said Alice.

Once they were all inside the empty defense classroom, James pulled three wands out of his pocket and started handing them out.

He gave Lily's old wand to Harry, Frank Longbottom's old wand (which he'd gotten from Alice) to Neville, and a new wand to Hermione. "I guess the first thing I should teach you about is wands. What they do and how to safely use them," said James. Hermione's hand immediately shot up. "Yes Hermione."

"According to the 'Standard Book of Spells, Grade One,' a wand is used to focus a wizard's magic. They are made out of..."

They had a productive lesson where both James and Alice rotated teaching them. It soon became clear that Hermione had memorized several school books. She also seemed to catch on to spellcasting a bit faster than the two boys. After a few hours, each of the children had learned some simple spells such as 'Wingardium Leviosa' and 'Lumos.'

After the lesson, the kids were allowed to play for an hour before Hermione had to leave. They gave her a tour of Hogwarts, during which she quoted what she'd read about in 'Hogwarts, A History.' Harry commented how stupid it was that the staircases randomly moved. "It'd be one thing you could stand on them and say where you wanna go, but this just gets me lost sometimes." They ran into Bill Weasley during the tour, and he suggested bringing her along for one of Harry and Neville's weekend visits to his house. Harry said excitedly, "That's a great idea! We'll tell the Weasleys all about you. I bet they'd let you come over for the weekend too. They're the nicest folks!"

Hermione appeared nervous. "D-do you really think they'll like me? I don't want to intrude."

Harry smiled at her. "Why wouldn't they like you? You're lots of fun, and real smart!"

She blushed at the compliment. "Then I'll have to ask my parents."

-

She soon left (leaving her wand with James) and begged her parents to let her spend a weekend at the Weasleys. They agreed, but insisted that she floo to Diagon Alley on Sunday night to make sure

she was rested enough for kindergarten Monday morning. A few weeks later, immediately after their class, Neville, Harry, and Hermione flooded to the Burrow.

Hermione shyly stood behind the boys while a cheerful plump red-headed woman hugged both Harry and Neville tightly. "Hello Harry! Hello Neville! And you must be Hermione," she said looking at the shy bushy-haired girl.

"Hi Her-my-oh-nee," said a small smiling red-haired girl with her little face screwed up in concentration. She apparently had been practicing name pronunciation. She held out her hand, "I'm Ginny. It's good having a girl here!" she said excitedly. "Da only girls that ever come are much more older than me, and they're Bill's girlfriends.

Hermione shook the hand of the girl she noticed was missing one of her teeth. "It's good to meet you, too, Ginny."

The other three boys introduced themselves. "I'm Ron."

"I'm Gred."

"I'm Forge."

"Fred, George," shouted Mrs. Weasley, "Use your real names!"

"I'm Mr. Weasley," said the middle-aged red-haired man.

-

They enjoyed themselves, playing more inside than outside since it was still winter. Hermione was absolutely fascinated with all the magical things in the house. She watched in awe as dishes washed themselves. She really loved the magical clock that they had. Hermione spent the night in Ginny's room, getting to know her better. She'd never had many friends before. Most of the kids at her school didn't like her very much, so she was a bit overwhelmed with her new circle of friends.

Her parents were extremely pleased with how their daughter was finally acting like a child –sleeping over at a friend's house, doing

something besides studying all the time. While they were proud of how intelligent Hermione was, they knew that she needed to develop socially. Mrs. Granger said to her husband, "We should ask Ginny Weasley to sleep over here soon."

Mr. Granger smiled. "That's probably a good idea." He chuckled. "It's amazing. It took discovering she was magical for Hermione to start acting normal."

-

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 10 – Curiosity

“Well kids,” said James happily, “You all did great today! Next Saturday I’m going to start teaching you how to block unfriendly spells.” James had been very impressed with how well Harry, Neville, and Hermione had been doing in their weekly lessons. “You can go play for a few hours if you’d like. Just don’t get in any trouble.”

“Of course not, Professor Potter,” said Hermione politely. “It’s a privilege to be here, and I wouldn’t want to abuse it.”

Alice smiled. “We know you won’t, Hermione. It’s Harry and Neville we’re worried about.”

“Mum,” said Neville, “You know we’d never...”

“Intentionally get caught?” suggested James with a smirk. “You know the rules, where you can and cannot go. So be good today; we could use a break.”

After the kids had left, Alice turned to James with a worried look and said, “Are you planning on teaching them the Protego charm?”

James continued smiling. “Yes. We’ve been having them learn spells from first year through fourth year to test their magical potential. They’ve been able to do them.”

She looked uncertain. “I know they’ve been doing well, but the shield charm requires a lot of magic behind it.”

James shrugged. “I want to challenge them, specifically Harry, so that they’d build up their magical strength much faster than they would otherwise.”

She raised her eyebrow at her boyfriend. “You could challenge them with any other charm. Why are you concentrating on defense?”

James’ ears went pink. “Er, well, because that’s my subject. Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

"You can do better than that, Professor Potter," Alice said, looking him straight in the eyes. "I think you're hiding something from me."

His cheeks were getting pink. "You're right. I am hiding something from you." He took a deep breath as he saw her frown. "I think I will end up telling you about this, but I'd like to keep it a secret for now. All I can say is that I have a reason to want Harry to be very good at defending himself as soon as possible. Will you trust me?"

She gave him an appraising look before giving him a small smile. "Well Mr. Potter, I suppose I can let you keep your secrets...for now. Just don't try to lie to me again."

"Yes dear," James grinned at her.

-

In the meantime, Harry, Hermione, and Neville were wearing winter coats, gloves, and hats as they played a game of tag by the lake. Hermione had just been tagged by Neville when she said, "I think it's time for me to go home."

"You just sayin' that cause you're it," accused Harry, who appeared slightly upset she was ending the game.

"No, that's not it Harry. I promise!" said Hermione, almost on the verge of tears. "Ginny's coming to my house today to spend the weekend, and I've got to meet her."

"It's alright Hermione," said Harry desperately. "It's alright. You don't have to cry." He then hugged her and said, "I'm not mad at you."

Hermione, who'd never been hugged by a boy before, blushed as she hugged him back. "Thanks, Harry."

-

After they'd walked Hermione to Professor Potter's office and said goodbye as she stepped into the fireplace, Neville said, "I've got to take care of a plant mum got me. Wanna help, Harry?"

Harry, who was not interested in plants, said, "No thanks Neville. I'm gonna explore this castle."

"You shouldn't do that, Harry. You heard your dad. You'll get in trouble!"

Harry smiled mischievously. "Only if I get caught."

-

After Neville had left Harry, the Jr. Marauder made his way toward an area near the library that he'd never been to before. He walked past the library entrance, making his way down a corridor until he stopped in front of a tall suit of armor. He noticed a nearby door, so he tried the handle, and found that it was unlocked. He walked into what appeared to be an unused classroom. There were desks and chairs against the walls, and an upturned wastebasket. He had this funny feeling that he shouldn't be there. He was about to leave when he noticed it, propped against the wall facing him. It was a magnificent mirror that looked as though it didn't belong there. It was as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was a Latin inscription carved around the top, but he couldn't read it.

He walked up to take a look at himself. What he saw shocked him. He saw himself being hugged by his mummy, with his daddy standing behind them smiling. The boy sat on the floor and started crying. He didn't know what trick was being played on him, but he knew what he saw wasn't true. He saw his mummy die, and knew she wasn't coming back.

He didn't know how long he sat there crying in front of the Mirror of Erised before he heard footsteps behind him, and an unfriendly voice shouting, "Harry Potter! What are you doing here?"

He was about to respond when he felt a hand grab his right arm and force him to stand up. By the foul smell of the man, Harry could tell it was Mr. Filch without looking. "I was..."

"Your father's gonna here about this! I say that professors should keep their little kids like you chained up in the dungeons when they're

not with them!" Filch practically dragged Harry to his office and pushed him inside. As he was pulling a key ring out of his pocket, he hissed, "I'm gonna lock you in here until I get your father! Don't touch anything you little brat!"

"But I..." The door was slammed, and Harry could hear the lock turn. Harry's face was tear-stained and he was scared, but that didn't take away his curiosity. He looked around at the messy office, but what caught his eye was a sign on a drawer that said, 'Confiscated and Highly Dangerous.' He didn't understand all the big words, but he did know what the word Danger meant. He immediately walked over, pulled open the drawer and found what appeared to be an old parchment. His eyes almost popped out of their sockets when he saw that. He grabbed it, put it in his pocket excitedly, and closed the drawer. He made his way to a chair in the room as he thought to himself, 'Could this really be the Marauder's map that Dad, Padfoot, and Moony talked about? They said it had been taken away by Filch.' He decided not to tell his dad about it, but to sneak his mum's wand as soon as he could to try to activate it. He remembered when Uncle Sirius had bragged about how you say, 'I solemnly swear that I am up to no good,' to make it show the map and all the people. He smiled to himself as he thought of uses for the map. When the door opened, he immediately frowned, afraid of the punishment his dad would give him.

James walked into the office ahead of Filch, and he didn't look happy. "Come with me, Harry," was all that he said.

Harry hung his head down. "Yes sir."

-

After they walked to their quarters, James asked with a concerned look in his face, "Harry, why did you go into that room?"

"I-I didn't know I couldn't. It wasn't locked," he pleaded.

James took a deep breath. "I suppose you didn't know. I told Mr. Filch that he should lock that door if he doesn't want anyone to go in that room. Since you didn't know, I'm not going to punish you this time." He then looked at his son's tear-stained face with concern. "What did you see in that mirror?"

-

While James and Harry were talking about the Mirror of Erised, Ginny was just arriving at the Granger residence. Hermione had flooed to Diagon Alley from James' office. Ginny had flooed there with her mother from the Burrow. Mr. and Mrs. Granger had driven to the area and met the girls, at which point Mrs. Weasley left them and went home. They'd gone out to lunch at a nearby restaurant, where they began to know the red-headed four-and-a-half-year-old girl.

"So Ginny," said Mrs. Granger as they waited for their order, "What's it like to be the only girl with so many brothers?"

The girl looked like she was thinking hard for a few seconds before answering. "Sometime it sad an' borin' when they don't wanna play wit me, but at least I don't get hand-me-downs like my brothers," she said smiling.

"I see," said Mr. Granger with a slight smile, "What do magical girls do for fun?"

"Well, we go swimmin' in the pond, playin' with Gryffindor and Slytherin dolls." The girl smiled. "I always have Godric Gryffindor win and send Salazar Slytherin far away. A lot of girls have started reading story books about Harry Potter, but I don't need to read them. I know the real one. My friend Luna says they're gonna make dolls of Harry Potter." Ginny chuckled, "She also said that they'll actually be some kind of monster in disguise. I like Luna, but she believes some strange things. My mum says that I should ask her before I believe something Luna says, but I shouldn't say she's wrong."

"Then Harry really is as famous as 'Modern Magical History' says he is?" asked Hermione.

"Yep," said Ginny. "I thought it was bad the way everybody was cel, cel-e-brite-ink when his mummy died. But everyone was so happy You-Know-Who was finally gone. I don't know how anyone can be so mean like him an' the Death Eaters. Last year they killed Luna's daddy cause he wrote something in the Quibbler, a magazine that he owned, about You-Know-Who really bein' a half-blood orphan named Tom Riddle. Luna told me about it. I don't know if what he said about

he-who-must-not-be-named is true or not, but they killed her daddy at his office. She just lives with her mum now (Luna's mother died when Luna was nine – now she's four – and in this universe she might not do the experiment that killed her.), and her mum sold the Quibbler.

"How sad for the poor girl," said Mrs. Granger, frowning. "I certainly understand why everyone was happy to be rid of that maniac."

At that moment their meals arrived at their table, saving them from more discussion of Voldemort.

-

When they got to the Granger's house, Hermione asked Ginny excitedly, "Have you ever played a video game?"

Ginny looked confused. "A what?"

The two spent a few hours playing Donkey Kong on the Atari 7800. Ginny was fascinated by it and declared, "I got to tell Daddy all about this!"

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 11 – Dissendium

“I solemnly swear that I am up to no good!” said little Harry as he held his mum’s wand over the spare bit of parchment he’d found in Filch’s office. “YES!” he whispered as he jumped on his bed for a few seconds before sitting back down so he wouldn’t wake up his daddy. He’d sneaked him mum’s wand from his dad’s new hiding place. His dad was only letting him use the wand during their Saturday classes.

He started looking over the map, finding secret passages that would make it easier to sneak around the castle when he felt like exploring. He couldn’t read all the long names, but he did recognize ‘Albus’ (who was in his living quarters above his office), and Filch (who was in the same hallway as the Potter quarters). He saw himself and his daddy, and then found Aunt Alice and Neville. He looked over to Gryffindor Tower (he recognized the G-r-y even though he couldn’t spell it) and looked at the names in the boys dormitories. He saw Charles Weasley’s name with the second years and could sound out enough of it to realize who that was. He couldn’t find Bill Weasley, although he saw William Weasley with the fourth years and recognized the last name. He silently wondered why William Weasley told everyone his name was Bill.

He looked at the map half the night, and then hid it with his muggle comic books, still active. He didn’t want to always have to sneak his mum’s wand when all he was doing is looking at the map. He’d only take it when he needed it. His daddy had told them that since he wasn’t a student, no one could make him turn out his pockets or punish him in any way. All they could do is hold him somewhere and get his dad. Not that facing his dad after rule-breaking was a pleasant prospect, but at least he wouldn’t have to mop the floors with Filch.

-

The next day after breakfast, he showed the map to Neville, who thought it was, “Cool!”

“Yeah, my daddy and his friends made it so they could sneak around the castle.”

“Wow,” said Neville, “I bet they never got caught!”

“Well,” said Harry, “Daddy says sometime they did but they usually didn’t when they were using the map.”

“Oh,” said Neville, “They were caught even with this?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, “You wanna go explore the castle?”

Neville shook his head. “I don’t wanna get in trouble! Mommy says if I go exploring she won’t let me go out anymore.”

“Ok Neville,” said Harry, “I’ll go myself.”

-

About a half hour later, Harry was on the fourth floor looking at a rectangular mirror that was about eight feet tall. According to the map, it led out to Hogsmeade, but he didn’t see how. He looked at the map and saw a miniature version of himself saying something. He did his best to sound out the password. “Dis-en-ti-am.” Nothing happened. “Dis-en-de-um.” Still nothing. He tried several times, growing more and more frustrated, until finally he said, “dis-send-de-um,” properly. The mirror turned inwards, like a door. Harry stepped inside and repeated the password again so that the mirror closed. He knew he could only be gone about an hour longer before his daddy would be worried. He stuffed the map in his jeans pocket. He could barely see in the dark, and wished he’d brought his mummy’s wand with him so he could use the ‘lumos’ spell his daddy had taught him. He took a step forward and fell down a short staircase, screaming the whole way down. By the time he stopped rolling, he was crying. It was dark and he was hurting, especially his left arm, which he couldn’t move. He was also on top of a puddle.

After sitting there crying for about fifteen minutes, he realized that no one was gonna come get him. Using his right hand, he got himself up off the floor. He winced when he put pressure on his right foot, but managed to stand. He slowly turned the direction he’d come from, and started taking baby-steps. Although his right foot hurt him a bit (he was limping), he found he could still walk. He was crying from the pain and the fear that had taken hold of him, but kept moving, feeling the stairs with his feet as he slowly made his way back to the door. When he reached the doorway, while trembling from the pain, he

managed to say, “dissendium,” correctly, and the mirror opened inside. He looked out into the light, and found that he was having a hard time seeing. With his right hand, he took off his glasses and saw that the right lens was cracked vertically, right down the middle. Not knowing what else to do without a wand, he put them back on started walking toward the hospital wing, keeping his right eye closed. His daddy had told him to go there if he got hurt.

Professor McGonagall was walking through the hall on the fourth floor when she saw a filthy little boy who was crying and limping with his left arm hanging at his side like dead weight. She could barely recognize him as Harry Potter. He looked terrified as he trembled. He also appeared to be winking. She wondered why until she noticed his glasses were broke.

She immediately ran up to him. “Harry, what happened?”

Still sobbing, he said, “I-I fell down some stairs. I hurt. I-I going to hospital wing.”

“Oh dear heavens!” she exclaimed, “Let me levitate you to there! Can you lie down?”

-

After a painful trip to the hospital wing, Harry was set on the bed. McGonagall left to find his daddy while Madam Pomfrey checked him over. The first thing she did was scourgify him. Five minutes later, James and Alice burst into the room looking terrified.

“How is Harry?” demanded James of Madam Pomfrey.

While she continued to work on Harry, she said sternly, “He has several bumps and bruises, his right ankle was sprained slightly, and his left shoulder was out of joint. Oh, and his glasses broke. I’d like him to spend the next three days here while I make sure that nothing else is wrong with him. We don’t want his spine growing crooked or anything. You need to watch your son more carefully.”

“It’s not daddy’s fault!” Harry said, and winced from pain, “I was bad! I was explorin’ when daddy told me not to, an’ I fell down some stairs.”

James was at Harry's bedside and held his right hand, afraid to hug him because of his injuries. "That's right son, and you will be punished after you get out of here. But for right now, I'm just glad you'll be all right! I'm also proud of the way Professor McGonagall said you were coming here on your own. That was very brave of you."

"I didn't feel brave," sobbed Harry, "I felt scared."

"But you did what you had to do anyway," said James. "That's what bravery is – being able to do what's needed, even if you are afraid."

"How are you feeling, Harry?" asked Alice, who'd walked up to his bed.

"I feeling lots better than when I got here," he said with a slight smile.

"Now, I've got work to do," Madam Pomfrey declared, "and I can't have you here in the way. You can visit him at six o'clock. For now, out!"

-

At six o'clock exactly, James, Alice, and Neville showed up for a visit to find that cards, candies, and even flowers had already started arriving from staff members, including Minerva and Albus. James had sent an owl to both Hermione and the Weasleys, figuring that Harry would enjoy a get-well card from them. Harry told Neville, "You was right. I never goin' explorin' again." James silently wondered how many days it would take for Harry to break that vow.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 12 – Conversations

“Come in James, come in.”

The door in front of Professor Potter opened of its own accord and he stepped inside. He smiled as he saw the phoenix looking at him. “You wanted to see me, Headmaster.”

“Yes,” said Dumbledore. “Have a seat. By the way, how is Harry doing? I understand Madam Pomfrey just released him before dinner.”

James grinned. “He’s fine, though a bit shaken up still. He’s in our quarters being guarded by a house elf. He still won’t tell me where he fell at, but based off of where Minerva found him, I have a good guess. If I’m right, he’s going to have a surprise if he tries that passage again.”

“I see,” said the aged professor with a twinkle in his eye. “And how are your special lessons with Harry and his friends going?”

“They’ll all making excellent progress,” said James proudly. “They’ve even learned a few fourth year defense spells.”

“I’m sure that their teachers and classmates alike will be surprised by how far ahead of their Defense classes they will be when they become first years.”

“I’m sure they will.”

“Now that we have enjoyed a respectable amount of small talk, I’m sure you are interested in finding out the reason I asked you here,” said Albus amiably.

James leaned forward in his chair. “I must admit that I am curious.”

“I believe that I have discovered the location of a Horcrux...” said Dumbledore.

James smiled, and then frowned. “Are you sure? Did, did you get it?”

“To answer your questions, yes I’m fairly certain and no, I didn’t get it.” Albus sighed. “I went to the house where Voldemort’s mother grew up and found the hiding place. I did a Horcrux detection spell from a bit further than the usual range and got a faint reading. However, I also checked its hiding place for curses, and found a number of dark spells protecting it that I’m not familiar with. Since it was not an emergency, I decided to exercise discretion and better prepare myself for the task. I also thought I’d ask for your help. You after all were an experienced auror and have fought dark magic yourself.” He then indicated a scroll on his desk. “This is a detailed list of everything that I detected. I’d appreciate it if you’d study it and help come up with countermeasures for those curses. Feel free to elicit help from Professor Longbottom, as she was also an experienced auror.”

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It was Friday night, and Harry had just gotten back from dinner thirty minutes before. He was in his room, bored out of his mind with nothing to do but work ahead on his lessons. ‘One thing bein’ grounded is good for,’ thought Harry, ‘is getting ahead in lessons.’ He’d tried reading one of his dad’s defense books, but didn’t understand all the big words in it. He wanted to sneak out so bad, but he knew Truby was just outside his door and wouldn’t let him do anything. His daddy had gotten a note during dinner and asked Aunt Alice to take him to his quarters and get Truby to watch him ‘cause he wasn’t allowed to play with Neville for another week. He didn’t understand why daddy didn’t agree that getting hurt was punishment enough. ‘He’s just mad I won’t tell where I got hurt,’ thought Harry.

He pulled out the map that hadn’t been noticed in his pockets when he’d changed to hospital clothes. He was really glad his dad hadn’t seen it. He looked the map over, as he’d done many times during his punishment, seeing where everyone he knew was at. He specifically wanted to know where his daddy was. He found him on the map leaving Professor Dumbledore’s office and followed him with his eyes all the way to...Aunt Alice’s and Neville’s quarters. After a few minutes, a house elf named Zondy appeared on the map, and his daddy and Aunt Alice left together to go...to the library. Harry knew they could spend a few hours there, although he couldn’t understand

why someone would want to. He knew that his friend Hermione liked reading a lot, but did not understand why.

He followed the map and found that Filch was in his office with Charlie Weasley and Nym-something-Harry-couldn't-read Tonks. She was a nice girl that he'd met once while talking to Charlie. She didn't like her long first name either. Daddy said she was related to Uncle Sirius. Bill had teased Charlie, calling her his girlfriend, which made him mad. He wondered what they were in trouble for, if they'd gone explorin' like him.

He then noticed that Bill Weasley was in what appeared to be a broom closet with a girl Harry didn't know and wondered why they'd want to be there when they could be at the empty Quidditch pitch, flying around on broomsticks. That's what Harry really wanted to do, but he wasn't big enough. He'd learned it could be dangerous if he wasn't paying attention, but he still wanted to fly.

When he noticed that his dad was on his way back, he hid his map away.

-

Eight days later, Harry's exile was over as his lesson ended. Ever since the night he'd been watching the map, his daddy had spent a lot of time reading. He hadn't neglected Harry, but he didn't seem to spend much time away from books. By the end of the lesson, both Harry and Hermione had managed to produce a protego shield, but Neville had only produced a partial one. James announced, "We'll work on this shield again next week to perfect it. You've all done great! For now, this week's lesson's over, and all three of you can go to the Burrow for the weekend."

Shouts of 'Yeah,' rang through James' office as he held out the container of floo powder for them each to take a handful and leave. They already had their bags packed and in the room so they didn't have to waste a moment of their weekend.

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They arrived to find Molly Weasley, Ron, and Ginny waiting to greet them, along with another little girl they hadn't met. She had long dirty blonde hair, a necklace of butterbeer caps, and protuberant eyes that gave her a permanently surprised look. She was holding a doll of a boy with black hair, green eyes, glasses, and a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead. While Harry was turning red with embarrassment at seeing a doll of himself, Ginny excitedly said, "Hermione Granger, Neville Long-bot-tom, and Harry Potter, this my frien' Luna Lovegood."

"Hello Luna," said Hermione, walking up to politely shake the girl's hand, "It's good to meet you. Ginny's told me so much about you."

"Good meet you," said Luna, and then turned to the dark haired boy. "Harry Potter, you much cuter real than this doll."

Harry blushed and Ron glared at him while Ginny and Hermione giggled. Neville kept a neutral face as he walked up to Luna, extending his hand. "It good ta meet you, Luna."

"Good meetin' you, too, Neville," said Luna dreamily.

"Well," said Mrs. Weasley, "Now that all of you children have met, I'm sure you don't want to waste a drop of sunlight. I believe that it's warm enough for you to go swimming in the pond today."

"Yeah!" said all the kids excitedly as they scrambled to the proper rooms to change.

-

They spent about two hours in the pond (getting very shriveled up by the water) playing all kinds of games. After they dried off, they played games like tag and hide-and-go-seek. When it got dark outside, they came in, ate dinner, and started playing games like wizard's chess (which Ron said Bill was gonna teach him properly that summer) and Exploding Snap.

During the games, they started talking about different things. Hermione mentioned, "In the muggle world, no one could make a doll of Harry without his daddy's per...perm-miss-in. He'd get paid for it."

“Wow,” said Ron, “gettin’ paid just lettin’ people make dolls a ya.”

“Maybe I ask daddy ‘bout it when I get back Hogwarts,” said Harry.

“It must be neat livin’ in Hogwarts,” said Luna, “with all those gadfreks flyin’ ‘round.”

Hermione, who’d been warned about Luna’s weird beliefs, decided to change the subject before the boys got rude. “Hogwarts is great! They got ghosts and dungeons and a small man named Professor Flitwick who teaches charms, and a woman named Professor McGon-na-gall who turns into a cat!”

“They also gots a Quidditch Pitch dere an’ they got secret passages an’ everything! Neville an’ I get ta watch Quidditch games! Sometimes even practice when I not grounded!”

“Wow!” said Ron, “Can’t wait ‘til I go!”

“Mum said you was wand’rin an’ where you shouldn’ an’ fell down stairs an’ hurt yourself las’ time you was grounded,” said Ginny, “An ya wouldn’ tell yer daddy where you fell.”

Harry’s ears turned pink. He didn’t know that his dad gave those details when he’d postponed their weekend at the Weasleys.

Neville said, “He didn’ tell his dad, but he tol’ me. He was in a secret passage to Hogsmeade!”

“I said not ta tell nobody!” said Harry angrily.

“I didn’ tell no grownups, and they not gonna say, are ya?”

“No,” said Ron, Ginny, Luna, and Hermione all at once.

Harry sighed. “At leas’ I didn’ get caught by Mr. Filch that time!”

“That man gives me the creeps,” said Hermione. “Last week I ask him why he don’t use magic to clean the floors after our lesson while Neville and I was walking to the outside. He got mad at us and said that scrubbin’ by hand is better than magic. Then I said I read that

magic cleans more better because it don't miss a spot and he yelled to mind my own business. Neville and I ran for it while he was talkin' about hanging kids by their toes with the old punishments."

"Have you been to the forbden forest?" asked Luna. "I heard the romsacks chased the vampires out. Have ya seen any?"

Hermione sighed as Neville stared. "I haven't seen any romsacks," she said politely, "but I did notice a stag at the front of the woods last week. It seemed to be watching me and Neville."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 13 – Visiting Hogsmeade

“Dad,” said Harry during lunch on Monday, “This girl Luna who Ginny’s frien’ had a doll a’ me.”

James stiffened. “I was afraid of that,” he muttered and then sighed. “They do that because you’re famous.”

“It must have been very handsome?” said Alice with a grin, who was sitting with them.

“Well,” said Harry blushing with his head down, “Luna said I cuter than the doll.”

Alice and James chuckled. “I’m sure you are,” said Alice.

“Anyways,” said Harry, who was blushing even worse, “Hermione said in da muggle world they can’t make dolls a folks without permshon. They’d have ta pay us.”

James took a deep breath. “Hermione is absolutely correct that in the muggle world no one is allowed to use your likeness without your permission. Unfortunately, the people who make laws in the Ministry of Magic are more interested in regulating cauldron bottom thickness than protecting people’s privacy.” He sighed. “I’m sorry, but it’s not illegal here.”

“Nuts!” exclaimed Harry. “I was hopin’ we could get money so as I could get my own wiless wiziding netwok reciveer for my room.”

James chuckled. “If you can stay out of trouble, I might get you one for your birthday.”

“That’s why I gots ta get money,” said Harry, “cause I can’ stay outta trouble.”

Both James and Alice laughed at this.

-

A week later, Harry finally got up the courage to try the fourth floor passage into Hogsmeade again. This time he wanted to bring a wand. He'd practiced 'lumos' and 'nox' several times over the course of that week so that he'd see where he was going. He, Neville, and Hermione had finished their lesson (all of them managing to use the Protego shield this time) and given their wands to James, who let them play around the castle for a few hours. Once they were outside the room, Harry pulled up the left leg of his pants, revealing his mommy's wand sticking out of his sock.

"Where'd you get that?" asked Neville. "I seen ya give it to yer dad."

Harry smiled. "You seen me give a stick dat looks like mummy's wand. I asked Truby ta make me one so I cud practice wand movements."

While Neville started chuckling, Hermione said, "That not good! You shouldn' a done that!"

"Why'd ya do it?" asked Neville.

"I wanted ta go back to da secret passage," said Harry.

"But ya got hurt there," said Hermione.

"It was dark an' me didn' have a wand ta light. I learn tha' spell. Lumos." A semi-bright light shone from his mother's wand, clearly impressing the other two kids. "Nox." The light went out. "I fell 'cause I couldn't see da stairs."

"I still don' think we should go," said Hermione unsurely.

"That fine. You an' Neville go outside an' play. I go myself. Jus' don' tell." He then turned and started walking toward the stairs so he could get to the fourth floor.

"Wait up," said Hermione. She then muttered something about 'Boys' under her breath as she and Neville joined him. "Someone got to make sure ya don' hurt yerself again."

-

They stood outside the mirror and Harry said, "Dissendium," perfectly and...nothing happened.

He repeated it again before Neville suggested, "Maybe you ain't sayin' it right."

"Take out that map again," said Hermione, "Maybe you don't remember right."

Harry pulled out the map, which he'd left on just in case his dad took his wand, and looked at it. Instead of showing him saying, 'dissendium,' it showed him saying, 'Lily's staircase.' After he'd said that, the mirror moved and Harry used the 'lumos' spell to reveal the staircase.

They all stepped in and closed the door, and turned back toward the stairs. They couldn't see the walls clearly by the wand light, but they could see the floor well enough to walk.

Hermione said, "We should go back," nervously.

"Yeah," agreed Neville.

Harry looked at them. "Ya can go back if ya want, but I goin' ta Hogsmeade."

The others reluctantly followed Harry through the long passage, and after about a half-hour they found a trap door. Harry moved it up a little with his head and looked around to see that no one else was in the room. He pulled himself up and was followed by the others. He returned his wand to its hiding space and looked around.

"Where are we?" asked Hermione as she looked at the boxes in the room.

"There stairs," said Neville, pointing at a staircase going up.

"Let's go," Harry said as he walked toward them. "I wish we could be invisible." He opened up the door a crack and found they were truly lucky. No one was looking. They quickly got out and closed the door,

and saw that they were surrounded by shelves full of joke-products, most of which they couldn't reach.

Neville whispered, "This must be Zonkos! I heard 'bout it."

"Wanna look 'roun' here or look outside?" asked Harry.

Hermione looked conspiratorial. "I heard dere's a candy shop here. My mum an' dad don' let me have any at home. I thought I could get some here."

Harry grinned at her, clearly impressed. "Candy sound good. I gots a few sickles. How 'bout you?" Both of the others had some as well (Hermione's parents let her have some wizarding money for when she was in that world).

They walked around Hogsmeade for a few minutes, Harry purposely hiding his scar as they occasionally were stared at by strangers until he insisted they stop at a store that sold Quidditch caps and bought a cheap one that advertised his favorite team to cover his scar. They went on until finally finding Honeydukes (Hermione could read it).

The woman behind the counter smiled at them. "Hello children. You seem a bit young to be all alone."

"Er, our parents are at another shop. They said we could get some candy an' gave us money," said Hermione with a straight face. She then pulled out her money and the others followed suit."

"I guess that's alright," the woman said with a friendly tone of voice. "Just be careful and let me know if you need any help."

Harry whispered, "She don' wan' us to knock anythin' down."

-

Hermione got some sugar-spun quills, Toothflossing Stringmints, and a chocolate frog. Neville got a box of Every Flavor Beans and Fizzing Whizbees. Harry got five chocolate frogs, several honey-colored toffees, and some Droobles Best Blowing Gum. After they'd paid for

their sweets, Hermione said, "We better get back," and Harry agreed because they'd already been gone for over an hour.

They walked back into Zonko's joke shop and waited near the door to the cellar until no one was near it, and quickly got into the door. When Harry was picking up the trap door, they heard someone coming, so they got in there as fast as they could and closed up the passage. Harry lit his wand and they hurried back to school, checking the map before opening the door, and started walking toward Harry's quarters.

"There you are!" said Alice, who turned a corner on the third floor to see them. They'd managed to fit their purchases into their pockets so that they weren't carrying bags. "Where'd you get that hat, Harry?"

His face immediately turned red. "Er, had it for ages."

She looked at him suspiciously. "Then why does it still have a tag on it?"

Harry swallowed. He knew he was busted.

Before he could answer, Alice winked at him and said, "Neville, I need you to help me water some new plants Professor Sprout gave us." She then walked off with Neville.

"That was nice of her," said Hermione. Let me see that hat."

-

After Hermione had removed the tag, she gave it back to Harry, who put it in his back pocket. "I think I better go back to your dad's office so I can floo home," said Hermione. "I had fun. Thanks fer showin' us the passage. I'll see ya next week."

She left after Harry said goodbye, and walked by herself to Professor Potter's office. When she got there, with a sugar quill in her mouth, she found he was waiting for her.

He smiled at the little girl. "So," he said, "where have you, Harry, and Neville been?"

Her ears turned pink, but she looked him in the eyes. "Aroun' playing."

"Where'd you get the candy?"

Her eyes went wide. "Er, well, um, Charlie Weasley gave it to us. We, er saw him in the castle."

Anyone who'd been an auror for more than a few days could tell she was lying, but he did want to be fair. James didn't want to accuse the kids of something he couldn't prove. It was more important for him to find out where they went and what they did. He and Alice had been searching the castle and grounds for the kids for an hour. He had a strong hunch based off of what Harry had tried to do a few weeks before that they had snuck off to Hogsmeade, and he'd take steps to make sure they couldn't do it again, but for now he didn't see anything he could do fairly except saying, "Ok. Well, I'll see you next week."

"Goodbye, Professor Potter. I'll see you then."

-

"Thanks for coming, guys," said James to the two marauders who were sitting in front of him in the Potter quarters. Harry was with Neville at the Longbottom quarters.

"Anytime," said Padfoot.

"So, what's the problem with Harry?" asked Remus.

"I want to know which of you told Harry about the secret passages to Hogsmeade."

"What?" said Remus.

"I think he knows about at least two of them. Although he won't admit it, he fell down the stairs in that dark passage on the fourth floor and hurt himself. I changed the password when that happened a few weeks ago. I think he and his friends snuck into Hogsmeade a few days ago."

“So, assuming he didn’t somehow find out the new password, he knew another passageway.”

“One of his friends was eating what looked like a sugar quill when she went home.”

“Honeydukes,” said Sirius.

“Honeydukes,” said James nodding. “I also changed that password, as well as all the others. I want to know what Harry knows.”

Lupin spoke first. “I never told him anything about the secret passages, James.”

“Both Moony and Prongs stared at Sirius until he finally spoke. “I might have mentioned that there were passages to Hogsmeade, but I swear I didn’t tell him where. Mind you, I probably would’ve when he turned eleven, but not now. He’s way too young!”

“What exactly did you tell him?” asked James.

“I just said there were passages that we put on our map before...”

“The map!” asked James. “You told him about the map?”

“Well, yeah. It’s not like he could get it back from Filch.”

“Filch? Damn! Filch left him alone in his office the day before his first attempt at going to Hogsmeade.

“He’s a true Marauder,” said Sirius with a smirk, earning a glare from Remus.

James ran his hand through his hair. “Did you tell him how to activate it?”

“Well, yeah. This was before...while you were still an auror. He thought the password was funny.”

James took a deep breath. “And the map will tell him the right password no matter how many times I change it.”

“And I’ll bet he keeps the map hidden,” added Lupin.

“Well, then we’ve got to find a way to temporarily seal those passages,” said James. “I’m not gonna be a hypocrite and say I won’t ever let him use them, but he’s way too young now!”

“We don’t have to seal the passages, just set it so that the map won’t properly read the passwords,” said Moony.

“Maybe have it read a message from us instead,” suggested Padfoot with a smirk.

-

The next time Harry tried to follow the secret passage, he did receive a surprise. After the password didn’t work, he looked at the map to see himself say, *‘Mr. Moony presents his compliments to Mr. Potter, and begs him to stay at Hogwarts before he gets in more trouble. Mr. Prongs agrees with Mr. Moony, and would like to add, nice try, Harry. Mr. Padfoot would like to register his astonishment that Mr. Potter has already found the secret passages, and add that he won’t be able to use them until he’s eleven.’*

“Nuts!” muttered Harry as he read the messages. He didn’t understand every word, but he got the message. He was busted. ‘Well,’ Harry reasoned, ‘At least I still got the map.’

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 14 – The Curse

“...And Charlie Weasley has caught the Snitch! Gryffindor wins 230 to 100! Better luck next year, Ravenclaw! Gryffindor wins the House Cup! No one can...”

At that moment Professor McGonagall took the megaphone away from the rather biased announcer from her house, although she looked rather happy herself. Gryffindor was the only team Ravenclaw had lost against this year. They were fierce competitors for both the Quidditch cup and the House cup. The Slytherins were bright enough to complete, but so many of them had a tendency to break the rules and lose house points that they ended up behind Hufflepuff. At least by seventh year most Slytherins had learned that they accomplish nothing by cheating, and their nefarious natures have been overcome so that they can contribute to society in a positive way. Very few of their graduates had gone on to become Death Eaters since Professor Vector had become their Head of House six years ago, and now with Voldemort vanquished they were even less likely to become dark wizards.

Harry was sitting in the stands with the rest of the Weasleys, the Longbottoms, his dad, and Hermione, whose parents thought it would be a good idea for her to watch the game. They were all cheering loudly for Charlie.

Over the last few months, Harry, Hermione, and Neville, with the use of the map, had gotten better at avoiding getting caught. They could no longer sneak off to Hogsmeade, but there were still plenty of places in the castle to sneak off to. They had explored pretty much every inch of the castle besides the other passages to Hogsmeade, which Harry discovered he had been banned from. His dad had never said a word about it, but had seemed a bit smug when Harry got back from his failed attempt.

Bill shouted, “I’ll bet the party in the Common Room’s going to be awesome! We haven’t beaten Ravenclaw for the cup since my first year!”

Harry brightened up at this idea. "Dad, we gots ta go to the party! Can me an' Hermione? I sure Aunt Alice'll let Neville come wit us if we go!"

James looked deep in thought. "I'm afraid not. As I recall, those parties weren't exactly suited for kids your age. There'll be a lot of boys and girls kissing." He smiled as he saw the disgusted look on his son's face. "And other nasty stuff like that."

"Ew!" said both Harry and Ron, who was sitting next to him. "Why would dey wanna do that when they could play hide an' seek?"

James chuckled as he said, "I don't know, son. I'll tell you what you can do though. You can tell Charlie what a great job he did when he comes out of the locker room. The Weasleys will probably be there too. We have a surprise for you and Neville. The Weasleys are letting you and Neville stay with them for a week. Truby has already packed your things!"

"Yay!" shouted both Harry and Ron.

Harry said, "I gots to tell Neville!" Harry got up and went over a few seats to where Neville sitting.

-

A few hours later, James, Alice, and Dumbledore were in his office discussing the protections around the Horcrux in the House of Gaunt. They'd arranged for Harry and Neville to be away so that they could concentrate on this matter. "I believe that we've found the procedure for getting past the protections you found," said Alice. It would take extremely fast wand-work for any one wizard to handle."

James continued the explanation. "We came up with a plan where all three of us combat those protections. We've set up individual task lists that we'd like to practice together every night this week, and then if we're ready, we visit the house next Saturday."

Albus looked extremely pleased. "Very well. Shall we begin immediately?"

-

The week went by quickly, both at the Burrow and at Hogwarts. Hermione only stayed the weekend at the Weasleys because she was enrolled in a public school, but Harry and Neville spent the whole week with the Weasleys, swimming in the pond, playing games, and...doing their lessons under Mrs. Weasley's supervision, much to their disappointment.

James, Alice, and Albus practiced every spare minute they could, and within a few days were able to fire off the appropriate spells in perfect sequence every time. It was a long series of spells that took them nineteen minutes to perform. The time limit was twenty minutes. Albus had commented, "Tom Riddle was the fastest duelist I've ever seen. Obviously this obstacle was set to work with his strengths; doing something few others would be able to do. Casting spells as a team probably never occurred to him."

-

On Saturday morning after breakfast, the three professors went back into Dumbledore's office where he made a portkey out of a rope. They felt the familiar tug behind their navels, and landed on their feet in a small, old, dusty house in New Hangleton. "Come this way," said Albus as he led them to a stairway that went down into a basement. They came up to a door, and Albus cut his finger with a small dagger and put a drop of blood on the handle. He then healed the wound with his wand and opened the door.

They were faced with three Inferi, whom James engulfed in flames before they could even move. They stepped forward and saw the ring of Slytherin in a see through display case. "This is where we must begin," said Alice.

They began the sequence of spells they'd been practicing, causing the room to glow every hue of the rainbow in sequence as the barriers were passed. When they finally finished, the glass of the case dissolved. James cautiously walked up, reached forward, and grabbed the ring as Alice and Albus watched. He started to walk away and placed the ring in his pocket, saying, "Ouch," as he did so. Alice noticed that he looked a bit pale. They were nearly all the way

up the stairs when James fell unconscious and started tumbling down. Albus quickly shouted, "Wingardium Leviosa," to stop James' falling, and then proceeded to quickly levitate him up the stairs.

"What's wrong with him?" demanded Alice.

Dumbledore sighed while moving quickly, "I'm afraid I don't know. We must get him to Madam Pomfrey at once!"

He picked up an old piece of wood and turned it into a portkey, and moments later the three of them appeared in the hospital wing of Hogwarts, where James was soon having every diagnostic spell imaginable done to him.

Pomfrey finally spoke. "There is something that seems to have originated from a cut in his right hand that is slowly trying to take over his body. There's a battle taking place, and until it's over, Professor Potter will be unconscious."

Dumbledore shook his head. "I should have known better than to allow him to come. Term is almost over, and the curse on his position doesn't want him to make it through the year. The Horcrux is trying to possess James."

"We need to get Harry here," said Alice soberly. "I'll floo the Burrow." She left with tears falling from her eyes.

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About ten minutes later, little Harry ran into the hospital wing covered in soot, tears falling from his eyes, leaving trails through the dust on his face. He was closely followed by Alice and Neville.

"I'm afraid I can't allow any visitors right now," said Madam Pomfrey to Harry, who ran around her anyway and put his arms around his daddy.

"No! You can't die too Daddy," he cried, tears smudging up his glasses. "Not like mummy! You can't! What'll I do? I need you daddy! I love you! I'll be good! I promise! Don't go away! Please daddy!"

Pomfrey gave up her attempt at maintaining order, and allowed Alice to walk up to Harry. She put her hands on Harry's shoulders as she made up her mind that if James was gone she would help Sirius, who she knew was his godfather, raise Harry. She would make sure that she stayed in Harry's life no matter what. She didn't say anything, but kissed his forehead as he sobbed on his daddy's shoulders.

Harry then took his daddy's hands in his, and then something strange began to happen. Smoke started rising from James' right hand, and his eyes began to flutter. Despite Madam Pomfrey's attempts to separate them, Harry held on tighter as James began to shake uncontrollably for about fifteen seconds until the smoke coming from his hand turned green, and a loud, anguished scream was heard throughout most of the school. The scream didn't come from James, but from the smoke.

James stopped shaking and opened his eyes. "What? We were at that house. Where am I?" He looked around. "The hospital wing. What happened? Why is my hand so sore?"

Harry let go of his daddy's hands and started hugging him tightly. "Daddy, daddy, you awake!"

Alice, along with the others, gave a sigh of relief.

-

The next day, after much study and contemplation, Dumbledore told James and Alice, "I believe that when you cut your hand on the Horcrux, that portion of Voldemort's soul transferred itself into you. That's why the ring no longer tests as a Horcrux."

"What I want to know," said Alice, "is what happened when Harry grabbed James' hand."

"Yeah, me too," said James.

"I believe that when Lily gave her life to protect him from Voldemort, it put a special mark in his skin. Voldemort can't touch him. When the cut that caused a piece of Voldemort to enter you was touched by Harry, that protection burned every part of him that was connected to

that cut. Fortunately, it hadn't gotten very far into you yet. If he had touched it a few hours later, the result would've probably killed you."

"Better dead than possessed by HIM," said James coldly.

"I quite agree that would be an undesirable lifestyle. Fortunately, as it is," said Dumbledore, "the Horcrux was destroyed and all you have is a scar on your right hand."

"I also wanted to ask you about the shape of the scar. Do you think it's a coincidence or if there is a reason for it?" asked James.

Dumbledore took a deep breath. "Only time will tell. But I doubt very much that it is coincidence that the scar on your hand caused by Voldemort matches the one on your son's forehead that was also caused by Voldemort so exactly."

James frowned as he took a look at the lightning-bolt shaped scar on his palm.

Dumbledore smiled, "I do believe that by directly defeating a piece of Voldemort that was assaulting you, the curse on the Defense position has been broken by Harry."

James smiled again. "I guess that attempted possession probably is the worst assault that the curse could throw at me."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 15 – Moving Things Along

Soon it was summer, and James had a lot more time on his hands to train Harry. Although normally most teachers went home for the summer, those that wished were allowed to stay at Hogwarts. James definitely wanted to stay so he could continue training Harry. Alice decided she and Neville would stay as well. The training moved up to five days a week, and Hermione, who obviously didn't need to go to summer school, was allowed to continue learning with them. However, since they had more time, James and Alice taught the children more than just defense. They started teaching the children the first-year level of every subject Hogwarts taught, without requiring homework as long as they could pass a quiz of the previous day's material. They also started the kids on some basic exercises.

They continued spending many weekends with the Weasleys. Some weekends Harry and Neville would stay with them, and other weekends, Ron would go to Hogwarts while Ginny went to Hermione's house. When his birthday came, Harry had a surprise party in the Great Hall with the Weasleys, Hermione, the Marauders, along with most of Hogwarts' staff. Harry did get a Wireless Wizarding Network receiver from his dad. A few weeks later, Ginny had her birthday party at the Burrow with the Potters and Longbottoms, as well as Hermione, in attendance. The week after that, the Potters, Longbottoms, and Grangers vacationed in Rome together, visiting both muggle and magical sites.

Classes soon resumed, and they went back to the normal schedule of defense lessons on Saturday mornings, although Harry and Neville continued their morning exercises (Hermione had gym class at school). James and Alice started giving their children muggle fighting lessons of what they'd learned in auror training every evening. Obviously they started it simple and made sure the kids could handle the lessons. It was slow progress, but they were turning the two boys into warriors. Harry and Neville continued to use the Marauders' Map to usually avoid getting caught while sneaking around the castle, and James didn't really try to find it. James had no idea that Harry had kept his mother's wand.

One day in December, just before term ended, James had Harry sit down to talk with him.

James nervously paced as he tried to tell his son something very important. "Er, Harry. You know how when Aunt Alice and I started dating you thought that we were going to be family?"

"Yep," said Harry, looking concerned.

James blushed slightly. "Well, it seems you were right, she and I are getting married." Harry's eyes went wide. James continued, "I want to know how you feel about that."

"Um, er, I....I dunno. What about mummy?"

James embraced his son, who'd started quietly sobbing. "We'll always love your mother, and miss her. That's not gonna change. Just like Aunt Alice and Neville will always love Uncle Frank. We're just combining our families, so Neville will be your brother."

Harry frowned, "And Aunt Alice will be my mummy, now?"

James looked his son in the eyes. "She'll be your stepmother, and she'll try to do what your mum wishes she were here to do for you. I'm sure that your mum is happy knowing that someone as nice as Alice loves you like she does."

"Will I have to call her mummy?"

"No, son. You don't have to. We discussed it, and we would like it if you called her mum and Neville called me dad, but we're not going to make you if you don't want to."

"I gots to think about it, daddy."

James smiled at his son, glad he didn't throw a fit. "That's fine. Aunt Alice is talking to Neville about this right now. We're going to meet them for a picnic lunch in about a half hour. I must say I'm proud of how you handled this."

Harry put his head down. "Well, when I was little, and you an' her started datin' an' I was mad, she tol' me that this could happen and I'd have ta be willing to give them a chance."

James chuckled slightly. "So, you've gotten a bit used to the idea. It's not as sudden as when we started dating."

"Yep," said Harry.

-

Lunch was a bit awkward at first, but things loosened up a bit when Harry told Alice, "I wish I could have mummy back, but if I can't have her, I glad to have you," and hugged her.

She hugged him back, with tears starting to form in her eyes. "I love you, Harry."

"I love you too, Aunt Alice."

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And so it was, that in June of that year, after term was over and Gryffindor had again won both the Quidditch and House Cups (with Ravenclaw in second place, Hufflepuff in third place, and Slytherin in last place for both cups), that the Longbottom and Potter families combined in a small ceremony at Hogwarts where Professor Dumbledore officiated and Alaster Moody made sure no one who wasn't invited got into the Potter wedding. A Daily Prophet reporter named Rita Skeeter made the mistake of trying to fly past the retired auror as a beetle. He'd set wards around the Great Hall (where the ceremony took place) that would cause any animagus (or anyone who was using Polyjuice Potion) to revert to their true form. When the beetle turned into a reporter in front of everybody there, Moody caught her and she was escorted out of the room, exposed, and fined as an illegal animagus. After that, no newspaper would hire her.

There were now two Professor Potters who would be teaching the next term. By the time of the wedding, both Harry and Neville (who remained a Longbottom) were both calling James and Alice 'dad' and

'mum.' The kids stayed with the Weasleys for a week during the honeymoon.

About a week after James and Alice returned from their honeymoon, Albus called them to his office.

"Ah, Professors Potter," he said with a twinkle in his eyes, "I'm glad you could make it. Would you like a lemon drop?"

"No thank you," said James, while Alice took one and then started to pet Fawkes.

"I trust you had an enjoyable honeymoon. Did you like it in Greece?"

"Yes," said Alice, "It was wonderful." James nodded happily.

"I hope you found your new, larger quarters satisfactory."

"Yes. The four bedroom suite is very nice," said James pleasantly.

"In that case, I believe we can get to the reason I asked you here," the headmaster said happily with a twinkle in his eyes. "I believe I have located another Horcrux."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 16 – Cave of the Undead

Harry and Neville were spending a week at the Grangers. It was summertime and they would both have their seventh birthdays in a few weeks. It had been a week since their mum and dad had returned from their honeymoon. During that week, they'd stayed at the Burrow. When James and Alice Potter suddenly needed someone to watch their boys for another week, they decided that it wouldn't be right to make the Weasleys watch them again. The Grangers had been more than happy to let the boys stay in their guest room when they were asked. At first the boys were skeptical about whether they'd enjoy themselves or not with Hermione, but as they played volleyball in the pool – three children against two adults – they had to admit they were having fun.

-

At the same time, Albus, James, and Alice were swimming toward the dark slit in a rock face. Even in the daytime the seawater was still chilly. Taking deep breaths that filled their nostrils with the tang of salt and seaweed, they struck out for their destination.

The fissure soon opened into a dark tunnel that Alice could tell would be filled with water at high time. They followed the thin passageway as it curved to the left. When they reached the right spot, they found steps leading out of the water and into a large cave. As soon as they got out, they pulled out their wands and dried themselves.

"Yes, this is the place," said Dumbledore.

"I can feel the known magic," commented James as Alice nodded.

"This is merely the entrance hall. We need to get past Riddle's defenses."

After a few minutes, Dumbledore found the entrance hall and expressed disappointment in Tom over the crude method of guarding the door.

"I'll do it," said Alice, producing a short silver knife like all her students used for chopping potion ingredients out of a travel potions kit and

pricking her finger before anybody could protest. As soon as she touched her blood to the wall, part of it vanished, leaving an opening into what seemed pure darkness. As soon as Alice healed her finger, they proceeded.

Soon they were standing on the edge of a great black lake, with a misty, greenish light coming from the center. "I suppose we should find out what we'll be facing," said James.

"Quite right, James," said Dumbledore as he pointed his wand toward the island, silently summoning the Horcrux. Instead of that, an Inferi seemed to jump straight out of the water. "Tom believes death to be the most fearful thing in this world, and has used images of death to guard the fragments of his soul, hoping to intimidate others with his own fear."

"Quite a good strategy if you ask me," said Alice as she grabbed her husband's hand. Albus only chuckled.

They walked until the headmaster found the tiny boat to take across the lake. "I wish I'd brought a broom," said James.

"I've no doubt that if anything besides this boat were ridden above the lake, the Inferi would all immediately attack, and I'm positive James, that you wouldn't wish your broom to be broken while flying above this lake."

Alice chuckled. James said, "No, er, I guess not. I guess we should get on the boat."

"Actually, I'm afraid that it will only allow the magical power of one adult wizard to board."

"What do you mean?" asked an intrigued Alice.

"Tom wanted to make sure only one person could ride the boat, but he didn't want size or weight to matter, since Polyjuice potion or an animagus transformation could get past a weight limit. He felt that magical power is the best way to measure someone. That way the only extra people that could come along would be children, whom Riddle thought would be of no use."

James looked at Alice with a big grin on his face, and his wife grinned back. Alice spoke. "About five years ago, an unspeakable developed a spell to make any witch or wizard appear to be a muggle to any magical power detection spell."

"It's sort of like disillusioning your magic," explained James. "...except that it lasts precisely five hours instead of waiting for a counter spell. It's a top secret, and only senior aurors know about it. It helps us get past certain wards at Death Eater hideouts."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled at that news. "Even I was unaware of this development. Tell me, do you know who developed this?"

"I have no idea."

"Very well. By all means, decide which of you will accompany me on that tiny boat and perform that spell."

"That's an interesting question," said James. He turned to his new wife. "If I go with Dumbledore, then you'll be all alone, but if you go with him, you'll be closer to the danger."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, James," she answered, rolling her eyes. "Don't be so overprotective."

James felt like saying he'd already lost one wife to Voldemort, but decided that wouldn't be a good idea. He heard himself say, "Which do want to do, dear?"

"I want to go on."

Since he didn't honestly know which choice was safer, he simply said, "Then be careful. I love you."

She smiled at her husband while Albus looked toward the Horcrux, and gave James a very passionate kiss. "Thanks for trusting me. Be careful yourself. I love you, too."

She pointed her wand at her center and muttered a Latin incantation, and stepped onto the boat, leaving as much room for Dumbledore as possible.

She truly found it disgusting seeing the bodies in the water, but was glad that so far none had attacked. When they got to the small island and saw the basin that looked almost like a pensieve, Albus tried to stick his hand into it, only to be blocked by an invisible shield. He soon concluded that the liquid must be drunk, to which Alice shouted, "Don't you dare! Do you think Voldemort planned on actually drinking this poison?"

"Well, no, but..."

"But nothing!" she said as she dipped a conjured cup into the basin. She held the liquid in her left hand while performing a spell. "Just as I thought! There's no way anybody could drink this! Maybe if someone else were forcing it down their throat, but the drinker would be almost completely useless and screaming in pain halfway through! By the time someone finished this, they might have some of their faculties back. Let me see what I can do." She pulled her travel potions kit she'd decided to bring this time. Considering the near tragedy they experienced last time they went Horcrux hunting, she felt they should take every possible precaution.

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In the meantime, James was standing around feeling pretty useless. He'd already practiced every fire spell he knew, figuring that he'd need them to fight Inferi soon. He wanted to know what was taking them so long. He felt half-tempted to disturb the water and alert the reanimated corpses just so he had something to do, but he knew better. This reminded him of the worst part of being an auror – staking out a suspect's house.

-

Harry, Neville, and Hermione were now playing Pole Position 2 on her Atari. They had finished swimming and dried off, and Hermione wanted to show them her muggle video games. Harry particularly liked the racing games, although he commented that he'd have preferred if it showed brooms instead of cars. So far, he'd won every race he played once he learned how to control the car.

-

"I'm ready," Alice said to the aged professor. She then poured a glass of a new potion she'd made into the basin, and the liquid turned purple. She could see the shield flickering, and then Dumbledore thrusting his right hand to the bottom of the basin, grabbing the locket, and pulling his hand out. He then put a bezoar in his mouth as his hand started to break out in painful boils.

As the liquid turned green again, the Inferi began attacking. Dumbledore, holding his wand in his left hand, began sending fire at their attackers while allowing Alice to be the first one on the boat. She conjured a wall of fire around the boat as soon as the headmaster stepped aboard.

-

James watched as Hell's army began to rise out of the black lake, and he was ready. He conjured a whip of flames, and began attacking them with it. Just when he was having a hard time keeping up with the ever-growing army, he noticed the flame-encircled boat drawing near. He began shooting fireballs at individual corpses, making sure not to aim toward the boat. Eventually, the others got to James' side of the lake, and he provided cover as they dismounted the boat. James had Alice run ahead of him, and Albus was at the rear.

At last, they finally got away from the Inferi and were able to stop for a minute. Alice took a look at Albus' right hand, which did not appear to have worsened since he took the bezoar. "Madam Pomfrey should be able to take care of this with a lotion," Alice said.

"Very well. I suppose it's better to have a minor injury than to be poisoned terribly." Albus then pulled the locket out of his pocket and examined it. His eyes widened as he recognized that it wasn't Slytherin's locket. He opened it and read the note that he found with a worried look on his face. "This complicates things."

-

A few days later, Harry and Neville returned to Hogwarts to be greeted enthusiastically by their parents.

“Did you get us any presents?” asked Harry.

“Isn’t us leaving you alone for a week enough of a present?” asked Alice with a smirk.

“Well, if ya didn’ get us nuttin’ then ya gots ta get us an Atari!”

James chuckled, remembering Lily talk about muggle entertainment.
“I’m afraid that it wouldn’t work here.”

“Nuts!” said Harry.

“Is there anythin’ like dat in the wizard world?” asked Neville.

“No,” said Alice, “but there should be.”

“So mum, dad, what did you do this week while we were gone?”

“Not much, really,” said James, “just school stuff.”

Alice added, “It was rather boring.”

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 17 – Black Manor

A few weeks later, Harry and Neville were arriving by floo at the Burrow with their parents. Hermione, Sirius, and Remus were already there with the Weasleys. It was noon on July 30th, and Harry and Neville were sharing a birthday party. Harry was thrilled when he realized this meant he could open most of his presents a day early, and Neville didn't mind sharing the party with his best friend / new brother.

"Hello Harry and Neville," said Mrs. Weasley, pulling them each into a bone crushing hug. "Happy birthday!"

"Thanks, Mrs. Weasley," said Harry and Neville together.

Soon they'd been greeted by everyone there, receiving a hug from both Ginny and Hermione.

Percy was the last to greet them. "Happy Birthday!" he said, shaking their hands. "You know, my birthday is next month, August 22nd, and this will be my eleventh, so I'll get to start at Hogwarts this September, so I expect we'll be seeing more of each other." He then turned to Professors Potter, who had arrived right after the kids. "Professor Potter and Professor Potter, how nice to see you again. I must say that Defense Against the Dark Arts and Potions are in my opinion, the most interesting classes that I'll be taking next year. From what my brothers have said and what I can tell by knowing you, you're excellent instructors and I expect to learn much from you both."

"Er, thanks Percy," said Alice doing her best not to laugh at his enthusiasm and sucking up.

James smiled. "Good. I just hope that none of my first years are suck ups. I can't stand that type of student who keeps complimenting me, trying to make me like them. I have a hard time stopping myself from lowering their grades."

"I certainly hope there are no kids like that in my class," Percy answered, apparently oblivious to the fact that he'd just been described.

James and Alice shared a smile before she said, "I believe we've got to talk to your mother about something."

"See you later Percy," said James as they hurried away from him.

-

Before long the kids were swimming in the pond while the adults were sitting nearby watching, Sirius included. He seemed unusually nostalgic as he watched the kids play. "That reminds me of before I went to Hogwarts and my family hated me for being sorted into Gryffindor. My little brother and I used to go swimming in a pond close to the house."

"It's nice that you have at least a few fond memories of your family," said Alice.

Remus asked, "Whatever happened to Regulus?"

James looked at his friend while thinking, 'Regulus Black – R.B. I wonder.' "Didn't Regulus become a Death Eater and then try to back out of it?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Sirius simply, "and it got him killed."

"What was his middle name?" asked James.

"Arcturus. He got his middle name from our grandfather on Father's side. Regulus was the name of Grandfather's youngest brother. Why?"

James looked at Alice, who'd caught on. She lowered her voice so that no one but James, Remus, and Sirius could hear. "If he'd stolen anything valuable from Voldemort before he died, do you know where he would have hidden it?"

Sirius could tell that something important was being hidden from him, but he trusted his friends. He said in a low voice, "Well, as far as I know, he never got his own place. He died at eighteen years old. I'd guess it would either be in the house or the family vault. The vault would've had a record of something being put in it, so I'd guess that it

was the house if he was hiding it from Voldemort. What is it you're looking for?"

James and Alice exchanged another look. "A locket," said James, "that used to belong to Salazar Slytherin." He took a deep breath. "It has a...type of curse on it. We've been looking for similarly cursed objects with Dumbledore. When we looked for that one, we found a fake one in its place with a letter to Voldemort signed with the initials R.A.B."

"And you think it might be Regulus Arcturus Black?" said Moony.

"I think it's worth a look," said Alice. "Sirius, does anybody live in your old house?"

"No," he answered, shaking his head. "My mother died a few years ago, and I inherited it. I still haven't visited it. If you'd like, we can go there after the party."

"If you don't mind, could it be next Saturday? I really don't want to miss either boy's birthday, and this might take a while," said Alice. "The boys will be here that day anyway, so they won't miss us."

"That's fine," said Sirius, "but I should warn you that there're probably a lot of dangerous things there. I'm sure that Kreacher, our crazy house elf, hasn't been taking care of the house. Anyway I think I'm gonna join the kids in the pond," he said, taking off his shirt and shoes and jumping in.

Soon James and Remus joined them as well while the women and Arthur (who didn't feel like swimming) watched laughing. Alice could be heard muttering happily about, "my three little boys."

-

The party was a complete success and everyone had a good time. Harry didn't get the gifts from his parents at that party though. They told him that he could wait until his actual birthday to open them and he should be happy he was allowed to open the gifts from the others. The next day at Hogwarts, Harry and Neville were surprised that Professor Dumbledore had thrown them a surprise party with the staff

that had remained for the summer. During the party, James and Alice shared their suspicions about R.A.B. with the Headmaster, and he said he'd like to accompany them as well.

-

As usual, they didn't say anything about their plans to the boys, who were simply enjoying a day with their friends. As soon as they'd flooed away, Dumbledore and the adult Potters left to meet up with Sirius, who'd advised against flooing based off of his family's security system that wouldn't let uninvited guests visit that way. Together they walked out of Hogwarts' grounds and James, who'd been there before, apparated his wife and then went back to get Dumbledore.

When they arrived at the outside of the house, Sirius was there. They did their best to ignore the appearance of the house. It had dirty walls, grimy windows, and a battered door that had a knocker the shape of a twisted serpent. Sirius greeted them. "Welcome to the disgraceful ancestral home of my so-called family." He then opened the door.

They stepped inside and closed the door. The first thing they noticed was the smell. It was as though several animals had died in there long ago. It was also dark. James pointed his wand up and said, "Lumos Maximus," causing the wand to light up the room.

At the same time, Alice pointed her wand at the room and said, "Scourgify!" which caused a large section of the floor to be cleaned up, causing the smell to lessen. While James kept his wand lit, Alice, Dumbledore, and Sirius cleaned up the rest of that room. They then saw several old style gas lamps along the wall. Sirius pointed his wand at them and muttered a spell, causing them all to light. James put out his wand and looked at the peeling wallpaper and threadbare carpet of a long, gloomy hallway, where a cobwebby chandelier glimmered overhead and age-blackened portraits hung on the walls. "Well, said Alice, "I'd suggest we carefully walk through every room and lighting whatever lamps are in it while we look for the locket. We've got to be watchful for any dark creatures."

They went through the house slowly and quietly, destroying several boggarts and other minor dark creatures. Alice banished curtains full of doxies as they searched, but one of the creatures escaped and

flew toward Sirius, who backed up and accidentally tripped on a chair that was behind him. Alice killed the doxie while Padfoot fell on the floor, causing a loud crash.

“WHO DARES DISTURB THE ANCIENT AND MOST NOBLE HOUSE OF BLACK?” shouted a woman’s voice from outside the room. The four of them left in search of the woman, who continued to shriek at them.

“That sounds like my mother,” said Sirius, “I hope her ghost isn’t here!”

“Are you plunderers, here to steal the valuable family heirlooms of the great Black Estate? The house elf won’t let you escape alive!” said the portrait.

At that moment a filthy old house elf appeared in front of them. When he saw Sirius, his eyes went wide and he bowed to the ground. “Master is come to the house.” He then lowered his voice. “Why does master bother the Ancient and Most Noble House of Black? Who is these people with him? Is this James Potter? Why is they here? When is they leaving?”

James looked at Sirius. “If this is an example of your elf’s work, I honestly suggest you give him clothes.”

At the same time, the life-size portrait, which had finally recognized Sirius, shouted, “Sirius, my disowned son! How I wish it was you who had died instead of your brother! I suppose you’ve come to move into the manor! I won’t stand for that! A blood-traitor like you living in this noble house!”

“SHUT UP, MOTHER!” he shouted, temporarily quieting her.

Kreacher then spoke up shaking. “You isn’t giving Kreacher clothes, is you master?”

Sirius was only half-paying attention. He was trying to remove the portrait, which wouldn’t budge. He turned to the elf. “Can you remove this portrait?”

"It is the mistress of..."

"I know who it is! If you don't remove it in one minute, you're getting clothes!"

Crying, the elf snapped his fingers and the portrait disappeared. "I is hoping the mistress will forgive Kreacher for doing," he lowered his voice a bit, "what my blood-traitor master is saying."

Sirius said, "Thank you. Now, did Regulus leave a locket in this house before he died?" When Kreacher didn't answer right away, Padfoot said, "Which do you prefer, old socks or underwear?"

"Kreacher is answering master! About a week before he is dying, the great master Regulus is bringing a locket and is putting it in a display case."

"Bring it here within the next minute," said Sirius, who knew that the elf would try to find a loophole in his orders if he didn't set a time limit.

The elf popped away and a few seconds later popped back holding a very dirty locket. "Here is the locket master is asking for," said the elf, adding in a lower voice, "Master is removing the last thing the honorable master Regulus is leaving here."

"James, take it and see if it's what you wanted," said Sirius.

Hesitantly, James took it and magically cleaned it. When he saw the serpentine 'S' he declared, "This looks like it!" Then he tried opening it, only to find that, "It won't open." He turned to Dumbledore. "Does this mean it is or isn't destroyed?"

Dumbledore took the locket and performed a spell on it. He then smiled, satisfied. "It would appear that Regulus was successful in his endeavor."

"The curse was removed, then?" asked Sirius.

"Yes," said Dumbledore, "and the inside was simply melted when your brother did it."

“Well, I’m glad my brother did something right.” Sirius then looked at Kreacher. “Clean this house properly now and keep the house properly, which means cleaning everything at least once a week, or you will get clothes the next time I come, and you are not to tell anybody anything about our asking you about the locket, telling you to get the locket, talking about the locket, or taking the locket, or anything you can think of regarding the locket.”

The elf seemed to think for a few seconds. “Master is very clever.” Lowering his voice, “Even though he is a filthy blood traitor and disgrace to his family.”

“Start cleaning, Kreacher!” Sirius then turned to the others. “I figure that since you won’t tell me what it’s all about, you don’t want anyone else to know about it.”

“That’s true, but don’t let that one secret stop you from giving him clothes. Otherwise he’ll learn secret after secret until you really can’t get rid of him,” said James.

“I will if I ever start using this house. Let’s go. I can’t stand the place. Imagine being locked up in here with that elf for a while.”

“I’d rather not,” said Alice, giggling.

“This day has been very productive,” said Dumbledore. “Sirius, I thank you for your hospitality and assistance. I also thank you for the locket.”

“You’re welcome professor.”

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They had lunch with Padfoot and still got back to Hogwarts less than three hours after they left. Now two Horcruxes had been destroyed.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 18 – Introducing Professors Potter

Less than two weeks later, Ginny had her sixth birthday party at the Burrow. It was very much like Harry and Neville's party. When it came time for Ginny to open her gifts, she saw Harry blush and hide his face when she picked up his gift first. That caused her ears to turn pink as she ripped open the package to reveal a small box of Honeydukes finest chocolate.

"Thank you, Harry," she said smiling. "They're my favorites."

"I know. You're welcome," he said. His voice was muffled because he was still hiding his face.

"That's interesting," said Fred Weasley.

"Yes, brother," said George. "It seems that young Harry..."

"Boys!" said Mrs. Weasley with a look that would've killed a basilisk.

Both twins visibly gulped as Ginny blushed. It was impossible to see if Harry's blush deepened because he was still hiding his face in his hands.

"Harry got a good gift for Ginny," said Fred.

"Yeah. That's all we were gonna say," said George.

"Honest."

Bill, Charlie, Arthur, and Neville chuckled while Hermione giggled. Percy was too immersed in a textbook to even notice. Ron simply looked confused as he stared at Ginny and Harry.

-

After the party, Neville and Harry went back home to Hogwarts. The next few weeks went by quickly, with Truby watching the kids play outside often as James and Alice worked on lesson plans (although James and Alice still made it a point to give Hermione, Harry and

Neville daily lessons). Before they knew it, the new term was beginning.

Harry and Neville sat together with their parents at the feast, waiting for the sorting to begin. Harry turned to his brother. "Hey Nev, what house do you think Percy will end up in?"

"I don't know. I know his brothers are Gryffindors, but he doesn't really seem like one."

The hat was placed on a stool and sang a song about the four houses.

"You're starting now at Hogwarts,

The best school of them all

And right now you are wondering

In what house shall you fall.

Perhaps you'll be a Ravenclaw

Where cleverness is key

Or maybe you're a Gryffindor

That's where the courage be.

You'll find yourself in Slytherin

If you have lofty goals

But Hufflepuff is the best house

For those with loyal souls.

Your house will be your family

So you won't be alone

So put me on and I will tell

Which house will be your home.”

After much applause, the first year students started putting the hat on as Professor McGonagall called their names. Harry and Neville weren't paying too much attention until Percy Weasley, the second from the last, was called.

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Percy nervously walked up to the hat as Minerva started to place the hat on his head.

Before it was even on Percy's head, the hat shouted, “Slythe...”

“NO!” shouted and thought Percy as the hat was dropped on his head.

‘No. But I can see your ambition clearly in your head.’

‘But I want Gryffindor!’

‘Gryffindor?’ said the hat skeptically. *‘I can see that you have some intelligence, although your ambition outweighs it by far. You may be able to make it in Ravenclaw. But you’ve neither the loyalty of a Hufflepuff or the courage of a Gryffindor.’*

‘But my family has always been in Gryffindor. I have to be...’

‘Like I said, you don’t have the courage to even be in a different house than the rest of your family. You won’t gain many friends in Gryffindor. You’re nothing like the others.’

‘I don’t care. I can’t have people thinking that I don’t have courage if I want to succeed, now can I?’

‘I suppose not, and it takes some courage to oppose me, but I’d be much more comfortable if I actually sensed that you wished to become a true...’ “GRYFFINDOR!” it shouted, earning applause from the appropriate table.

-

"I don't think that's where the hat wanted to send Percy," whispered Neville.

"No joke," said Harry, "You heard what it was saying. He belongs in Slytherin with all the Death Eaters."

"Not all Death Eaters are from Slytherin, and not all Slytherins are Death Eaters," said Alice, who was sitting with them.

"Sorry mum."

At that moment, the last person, "Oliver Wood," was called and sorted into Gryffindor, causing even more applause.

-

James could easily tell the difference between eager students and suck-ups. Eager students would raise their hands to answer every question, and wrote very long essays, but they always seemed humble and worried about their grades. Suck-ups did the same things, but they weren't humble at all. They just knew they'd earned an 'O' and wanted to remind the teacher of it. Suck-ups also wanted to pretend they were friends with the teacher and bother them everywhere. When James was a kid, he loved to play pranks on suck-ups. As James and Alice predicted, Percy was indeed a suck-up.

While everyone was finishing their desserts, the newest Weasley Gryffindor strutted up to the staff table and held out his hand to James. "Hello Professor Potter. I believe you were in Gryffindor, too. Weren't you?"

James fought not to laugh. "Yes I was, but the hat didn't try to put me in Slytherin."

Percy's face fell. He looked deflated. "Yes, well, the hat is getting old, starting to make mistakes. It certainly admitted it when it put me in Gryffindor where I belong." He puffed out his chest again. "If you ask me, the hat should be replaced."

"I see. Well, congratulations on changing the thinking cap's mind."

“Thank you.” He then greeted Alice and walked back to his table.

“I should have offered him the opportunity to clean my boots with his tongue,” whispered James to his wife.

She started laughing as she said, “That’s...ha...not...ha ha...nice.”

“I’d be more convinced you were mad if you weren’t laughing so hard.”

“I didn’t say it wasn’t true; only that it wasn’t nice.”

He then kissed his wife briefly, causing her to blush, their boys to pale, Dumbledore’s eyes to twinkle, McGonagall to glare in disapproval, the rest of the staff to chuckle, and most of the students to clap, whistle, or catcall (except Percy who felt like McGonagall but wouldn’t glare at a teacher so he glared at the table instead). Dumbledore took this opportunity to walk up to the podium to make his speech.

“Well, now that we’ve been fed, watered, and properly entertained, I have some start of term notices. First of all, as some of you may know, congratulations are in order for Professors James and Alice Potter.” There was silence in the hall for a moment, and then most of the students started clapping loudly.

When the applause finally subsided, the Headmaster continued. “Yes. During the summer our Defense Against the Dark Art and Potions teacher did indeed wed, and I must say that it was a beautiful ceremony, and it took place in this very room last June. Hopefully you won’t have too much trouble remembering to refer to your Potions instructor by her married name. I’m sure she won’t give you a detention if you accidentally call her Professor Longbottom during your first class.” There was a bit of chuckling. “Now to the less romantic announcements. As I remind the students every year, the Forbidden Forest is surprisingly forbidden. Mr. Filch has added the following items to his list of...”

He continued through the announcements until he bid them all good evening and the students went to their common rooms for the night.

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 19 –Pranking Percy

Over the course of the next few weeks, it became more and more abundantly clear that Percy was nothing more than an annoying suck-up as he constantly bothered both the Potter family and Professor McGonagall, his head of house. McGonagall, however, didn't seem to realize that all Percy was doing is sucking up to her. She seemed to believe he was simply studious for the purpose of learning. Neville and Harry didn't see him suck up to other teachers, but when they talked to first-year students (once they stopped looking at Harry's scar) they found out he was. In fact, he'd gotten one Gryffindor first-year they talked to in trouble for not paying attention in Sprout's class.

The younger Weasleys told Harry and Neville about Percy's boring letters, bragging about how he was at the top of his class, and how much the teachers liked him. He didn't mention the difficulty of the hat placing him in Gryffindor, but Harry was happy to inform their Weasley friends about it. One day, Harry and Neville were in their quarters when James Potter burst in looking aggravated.

"That stupid prat!" he said angrily before nodding to Truby that she could leave for the night.

"Who?" asked Neville.

"Percy, that's who! If I were his age, I'd..."

"What did he do now?" asked Harry.

James took a deep breath. "I probably shouldn't..."

"Come on, Dad," said Neville.

"Maybe we could do what you can't," said Harry with a wink.

James looked around with a wicked smile on his face. "Your mum's got another class to teach now, doesn't she?"

"Yeah," said Neville with a grin. "She won't know you told us."

“Well, you see there’s this kid in his class named Oliver Wood. He’s bright, but kind of shy. I’ve been trying to get him to come out of his shell for weeks. Anyway, I’d asked a question in class and Oliver raised his hand for the first time. I called on him. He was really nervous and was stuttering a bit. I think that when he gets over his shyness he won’t have any problems at all, but anyway, before Oliver could finish giving his answer, Percy interrupted. He said, ‘For goodness’ sake, the answer’s so easy,’ and blurted out the answer and got everyone else to laugh at Oliver, who didn’t take it very well.”

“What did you do?”

“I took away a few points from Percy for speaking out of turn, but there’s not much else I could do within the rules of Hogwarts. I suppose that if I wanted to abuse my authority and give Percy a month of detentions or something, I could have. But what kind of teacher does that?”

Harry and Neville looked at each other and smiled. “We understand.”

“I don’t want to know what you’re planning; just don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

“I’ve heard stories from Moony and Padfoot,” said Harry with a grin. “There’s not much you wouldn’t do to someone who deserved it.”

-

Sunday night, Harry and Neville found themselves standing outside of Gryffindor tower. They were hidden from view by an invisibility cloak they had borrowed from their dad who said, “You didn’t get this from me,” with a wink.

Harry looked down at the Marauders’ Map he was holding as they faced the portrait of the Fat Lady. The map revealed the password as ‘Mandradora.’ The portrait seemed momentarily confused to hear the password coming out of thin air, but opened anyway, saying something about students always sneaking around under invisibility cloaks.

Harry and Neville, still under the cloak, walked up the boys' staircase. Neville was carrying a bag full of charmed items with him. They'd gone to the school library and found a few necessary spells for this prank, and gotten Hermione to perform them on these items since she was best at Transfiguration. They quickly found the first-years' dormitory and easily found Percy's bed and his trunk. While Harry made sure Percy was asleep, Neville used a sticking charm to attach new Gryffindor badges on all of Percy's robes. He also switched out all of Percy's Gryffindor ties with apparently normal ones. They quickly left without anybody waking up.

-

The next morning, Percy looked completely normal as he walked into the Great Hall for breakfast. Harry whispered to his father, "Watch Percy for the next five minutes, Dad."

He was sitting at the end of the Gryffindor table eating his breakfast silently. No one really liked him, so he had plenty of room to himself, which made it easier to notice when his clothes changed. Percy, however, was too busy reading what appeared to be an essay as he ate to notice the slight difference until one of the Gryffindors sitting closest to him shouted, "Hey Weasley, I'm glad you're finally admitting where you belong, but could you go to their table?"

He looked up at the third year boy confused. "What are you talking about? I belong here at the Gryffindor table!"

"Then why are you dressed like a Slytherin?" said the girl sitting next to the boy who'd just spoken to Percy."

"What? I am no..." His voice trailed off as he saw that his robes had a Slytherin patch on them, and his tie was Slytherin colors. His face began turning as red as his hair. As he hurriedly got up, most of the other students noticed and began chuckling.

A first-year girl from the Slytherin table shouted out, "Quit disgracing our colors, Weasley! We don't want you!" causing the laughter to grow louder as Percy ran back to his dormitory.

James looked at his boys with a grin. "Cute, but still not up to Marauder standards."

Alice narrowed her eyes at her husband and sons. "You didn't have anything to do with this, did you?" she whispered.

James looked her in the eyes. "I didn't know a thing about this prank, and that's the truth." Although his wife didn't look completely convinced, she did turn away.

Harry whispered in James' ear. "It's not over. You have him at your first class today, right?"

James nodded with a smile, but signaled Harry to be quiet.

-

As it turned out, every outfit Percy wore that day was charmed so that a half-hour after he put it on, it would look like a Slytherin uniform. During Defense class, James simply gave Slytherin points when Percy answered a question, causing him to look at his outfit and turn red with embarrassment. James did correct the points (he didn't want to help Slytherin), but wouldn't let Percy leave early to change. He also didn't try to fix the badge and tie.

As luck would have it, the next class Percy had (which he arrived five minutes late to – losing five Gryffindor house points) was Potions with Mrs. Potter. When she noticed the change in Percy's clothes twenty minutes after he arrived, she tried to ignore it, but ended up accidentally giving Slytherin points for his finishing his potion first, causing his face to go red as almost every student in there began laughing.

By lunchtime, Percy was paranoid. He was convinced that one of his classmates was hexing him, so he kept looking around suspiciously. He then had McGonagall's class, where she took ten points from him for being out of uniform.

Fortunately for Percy, the charms Hermione had put on the badges and ties wore off the next day. However, he still got harassed about it,

especially when someone brought up how he was nearly placed in Slytherin during the sorting.

At the first opportunity James had alone with the boys, he congratulated them on their official initiation into the Marauders.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 20 – A Day of Surprises

“...and that’s the end of the lesson today,” said James. It was the Saturday before Hermione’s eighth birthday, and the kids’ magic lesson of the week was now complete. Alice collected the wands (although Harry was still returning a fake wand while keeping Lily’s).

“So go out and have some fun for while, and then kids you need to be back here in one hour so Hermione can go home,” said Alice, who was also helping teach the lessons.

“Okay,” said Hermione as she, Harry, and Neville took off toward the door, “See you later!”

Once the door was closed, James walked up to the fireplace, grabbed some floo powder, threw it down and shouted, “The Burrow,” as he stuck his head through the flames.

-

In the meantime, the kids were in a nearby abandoned classroom looking at the Marauders’ Map, trying to decide where to explore.

“Look here!” said Neville, whose expression went pale. “Narcissa and Draco Malfoy are here.”

Harry’s expression changed to anger, while Hermione’s changed to confusion. “Who are they?” she asked innocently.

Neville stayed silent while Harry took a deep breath. “Lucius Malfoy is a Death Eater. He killed Neville’s dad. He’s in Azkaban now, for life. Narcissa and Draco are his wife and son.”

“Oh, I’m terribly sorry. I didn’t know...”

“It’s alright, Hermione,” said Neville, looking into her eyes. “I would like to find out why they’re here.”

“Are you sure?” asked Hermione, looking scared.

“Yes I am,” he said firmly.

“Then let’s go,” said Harry.

They went through the hallways and secret passages, consulting the map as they went to make sure they knew where the Malfoys were as they walked around the castle. They were surprised to see the mother and child separate.

“Let’s follow Draco,” said Neville.

As they watched the youngest Malfoy walk around, he seemed to be going around in circles, but generally headed toward Gryffindor Tower. They noticed him stop in an empty classroom as Percy Weasley was walking in the hallway. As they were getting closer, they saw on the map that Percy had gone into the room with Draco.

As they finally got to the hallway, they ducked into another classroom as Harry wished he’d brought his dad’s cloak. They heard the two talking while they left the classroom.

“Thanks a lot,” said the voice they weren’t familiar with, which they knew had to be Draco.

“I was glad to help, but you shouldn’t have run off like that, Bobby.”

“Bobby?” whispered the trio.

Harry hissed, “He just didn’t want to admit his name. I wouldn’t either if I was him.”

“I know sir,” said Draco in what Harry recognized as fake adoration. “Thanks for directing me back where my mummy is.”

They heard his footsteps start coming toward them and then quickly go back. “I want to give you a gift for your help.”

“Oh, that’s not really necessary,” said Percy’s pompous voice.

“It’s no problem. You see, my uncle, Tom Riddle, will be making me a new one.” They heard him pull something out of his pocket. “You see, he’s a really smart person, a great wizard who was Head Boy at Hogwarts before he left to be very successful. He even got a reward

here for Special Services to the school. He charmed this diary with his intelligence. Whenever I have a question, I just write it in there, and it answers. This one's pretty old, but the advice I've gotten from it is really good! "He's helped lots of people do good in school and then business, not to mention personal life too. He gave me this so I could always have his wisdom with me."

"Wow!" said Percy.

"Write in it," said Draco excitedly.

They heard some scratching from a quill, and a few moments later, Percy said, "That's incredible!"

"Yeah, just don't tell anyone about it. They'll get jealous and want to steal it."

"I won't."

"Good. Thanks again Mr. Weasley," said Draco in mock humility as he walked away.

After he passed the classroom they were hiding in, Neville whispered, "Let's follow him."

"What do you suppose that diary is?" asked Hermione.

"Just some prank," whispered Harry. "It'll probably turn into a howler in his Common Room and shout everything he writes in it in a month."

Neville chuckled, "About him being better than everyone."

Hermione didn't seem convinced. "I still think we should warn him."

"As if he'd believe us. I'm sure not gonna show him my map to prove that was Draco Malfoy!"

"Well, I'm going to warn him!" said Hermione as she turned around.

Harry sighed. "Fine, just make sure to get back to my dad's office on time to leave."

“That’s about fifteen minutes from now,” added Neville, smiling, “Don’t be late.”

-

Hermione ran down the hall and quickly caught up to her target. “Percy,” she said, panting, “I think there’s something wrong with that diary.”

The redhead looked indignant. “How do you know about it? You were following me! Where are Harry and Neville?”

“They didn’t want to warn you. We weren’t following you. We were following the kid who gave you the diary. Neville recognized him as Draco Malfoy.”

“So because of who his dad is, you didn’t show him how to get back to his mother? He was lost! It’s probably that kind of prejudice against him that made him lie about his name!”

Percy stuck his chest out. “At least I’m a good example of a helpful person! So you think the diary’s bad or cursed or something just because a Malfoy had it? He’s been using it for years! It was his uncle, obviously his mother’s brother since his last name isn’t Malfoy, who gave it to him! Don’t you dare tell anyone about it! And that goes for your friends, too! It’s none of your business anyway! Now leave me alone!”

“Fine!” shouted Hermione angrily as she turned around and quickly made her way toward James’ office. Percy didn’t see the tears start to fall down her eyes.

-

Harry and Neville were following Draco as he quickly made his way through the castle like he’d been there a hundred times, not like someone following directions. In their hurry, Neville accidentally hit a suit of armor while turning a corner.

“Who’s there?” shouted Draco as he turned around to face his pursuers.

Harry noticed Malfoy's eyes dart up to his scar as his face turned into a fake smile. "Harry Potter," he said, and turned to the other boy, "and you are?"

"Neville Longbottom," he said coldly, glaring at the boy.

"Longbottom," sneered Draco, "Your father is the reason mine is in Azkaban."

"He's there because he's a murderer, and I think he got off easy!" growled Neville angrily. "He should've gotten the Dementor's kiss!"

"How dare you say that about him? He's a better man than your worthless father ever was!"

Neville, whose face was red, ran up to Draco, shocking him by punching him in the face, knocking him to the ground. The pureblood coward quickly got up and ran away, shouting, "You'll pay for that, Longbottom! No one hits a Malfoy!"

Neville started running until Harry grabbed him by the shoulders. "Stop, Neville! You'll get in trouble. Well, not really. I doubt mom or dad would punish you for hitting a Malfoy, but we'll be late for Hermione."

"Fine!" hissed Neville, as they made their way toward their dad's office.

-

Hermione left the girls' restroom where she'd stopped to wash her face. She couldn't believe what a prat Percy could be. She hoped the diary exploded in that git's face! She'd reluctantly helped her friends prank him before, now she knew she'd gladly help them in the future. She was only trying to help. She was brought out of her thoughts by her best friends' voices.

"Hey Hermione," called Neville from outside his dad's closed office door. She thought he looked upset about something.

"You're late," said Harry.

"Only by a minute," she claimed. "You didn't have to wait outside for me. I'm perfectly capable of opening a door by myself."

"So how did it go with Percy?" asked Neville.

"That prat said to mind my own business! Even after I told him who gave him the book!" When they looked concerned, she added, "I simply said Neville recognized him."

"Well," said Harry, "Let's go in." Neville then opened the door. "Ladies first."

Without a word she walked into the room, only to find it pitch black. Stepping backwards toward her friends, she said, "Er, guys. I think something's..."

"SURPRISE!!!" shouted a crowd in front of her and two boys behind her.

"Happy birthday!" said James happily as she registered what was going on. She looked around and saw the four youngest Weasleys, along with Luna Lovegood (and James and Alice Potter of course). There was a cake and a bunch of wrapped presents on the desk.

"Th-thank you," said Hermione, and then turned back toward Harry and Neville. "You knew?"

"Of course," said Harry as Neville nodded shyly.

"Your parents said you can spend another few hours here," said Alice.

Hermione hugged everybody there in turn, doing her best not to cry. She happily blew out the eight candles after making a wish. However, while everyone was clapping, they relit.

Ginny said, "Fred, George! Which one of you did that?"

After that prank was sorted out, she received various candies from the Weasley kids. James agreed to keep the ones she didn't eat at the party hidden so her parents couldn't confiscate them, earning a glare that quickly turned into a smile from his wife. She got a few spell

books from James and Alice. Harry got her a personalized magical stationary set and Neville gave her a non-magical plant.

She also got a butterbeer cork necklace from Luna, who claimed, "It protects you from yellow-striped fussybies."

Hermione politely put on the necklace, vowing to herself never to wear it again. She thanked everybody for their gifts and for coming before she flooed back to Diagon Alley to meet back up with her parents.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 21 – The Chamber Has Been Opened

Monday morning at breakfast found Percy Weasley walking into the Great Hall, trying to figure out why so many people were walking behind him and laughing. When he'd turn around, they'd stop laughing, and deny anything was wrong when he asked. Sighing, he resolved to follow Tom's advice to not do anything about them until he had power over them. Otherwise he'd end up in trouble.

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Harry, Neville, and James were sitting at the Head Table with Alice, and James immediately started laughing when Percy sat down facing away from them. He looked at his sons with a smile on his face. "Your work, I presume?" he whispered in Harry's ear.

"Of course not," said Harry, winking.

"I hope it wasn't you two," said Alice, looking at them suspiciously although there was laughter in her eyes.

"Not that anybody could prove," said Neville innocently.

"You'd better hope you're right," said Alice with a mock-serious expression.

-

A few seats away from Alice, Minerva was talking to the Headmaster.

"What is that on Percy Weasley's back?" she asked, reaching for her glasses.

"It appears," said Albus with a twinkle in his eyes, "to be a snake with the words, 'I wish I were in Slytherin,' written beneath it in green. Why do you ask?"

"This harassment of Mr. Weasley has got to stop, Albus. He chose to be a Gryffindor despite the hat's opinion, and shouldn't be punished

for it. Whether whoever is doing this likes it or not, Percy Weasley is a Gryffindor.”

“What would you have me do, Minerva? We don’t know who the perpetrator is. When we find out the culprit’s identity, we will of course punish him or her appropriately.”

-

Meanwhile, back at the Gryffindor table, no one would tell Percy what was wrong with his robes because bluntly, nobody liked him. By this time, people from other tables were laughing at him, and some Slytherins were shouting that they didn’t want him, but still no one would tell him what was wrong. In frustration, he got up and walked to the nearest toilet to take off his robe. He would never remove his school robe in the Great Hall, because that was against school policy.

When he saw the huge cobra on the back, he rolled the second-hand robe into a ball and threw it against the wall in frustration as tears threaten to start falling from his eyes. He sat down on the floor, his face completely red, and pulled a small book out of his school bag, along with a quill and ink bottle. He opened the diary and began to write,

“Hi Tom,

Those adolescents have done it again! Now the back of my robes say I want to be in Slytherin.”

The text disappeared, and new words replaced them.

“There’s nothing wrong with being in Slytherin. I was. Being in Slytherin simply means you want to make something of yourself. However, it’s easy to remove that charm from your clothes...”

Tom went on explaining how to remove the charm from Percy’s robe, and when he left just in time for class, it was with a perfectly normal school robe and an evil glare at everybody.

-

The weeks went by quickly, and soon it was Halloween. Harry and Neville were allowed to join Hermione and go trick-or-treating in the muggle world. Both boys were dressed as wizards in miniature Hogwarts robes, and Hermione was dressed as a witch (also in Hogwarts robes). They all carried their wands with them after getting an incredible strong lecture not to use them unless they were in real danger. They were just for decoration – part of their costume – nothing more. It was highly unlikely that they'd be in danger since they were going with Mr. and Mrs. Granger anyway.

"You do this every year?" asked Neville. The three kids were walking about ten feet ahead of the adults.

"Of course," said Hermione. "It's a long-established muggle tradition. It's the only time my parents let me eat candy. I'm glad your parents let you come this year."

"I think Mum just wanted to make sure we didn't prank the Halloween feast again," said Harry, causing Neville and Hermione to start laughing.

"Well, here's the first house. Just do what I do." She walked up to the door and rang the bell. When the door opened, she, along with her friends, said, "Trick or Treat!"

"Oh my, aren't you a cute little coven," said the old lady who answered the door as she put candy in each of their cauldrons.

"That was easy," said Harry with a grin as they left. "Why can't we do that every day?"

The other two laughed as they continued down the block.

After about an hour, when the cauldrons were almost full, they came up to another porch. This time, Harry knocked.

A woman in her thirties opened the door and the three kids happily said, "Trick or Treat!"

The woman smiled to himself as she gave them candy, until her eyes rested on the Hogwarts crest on their robes. "Hogwarts?" she

whispered, and then smiled broadly at them. "So, I guess you three really aren't in costume, although you seem a bit young."

"No ma'am, we're not students yet," said Hermione brightly.

"But Neville and I live in the castle," added Harry, motioning toward his stepbrother.

The woman looked at Neville, and then Harry. Her eyes widened as she noticed the scar. "H-Harry Potter?"

Suppressing his frown, Harry said, "That's right ma'am. And who might you be?"

"Bertha Jorkins. I work for the Ministry. It is a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter." She turned to the other boy. "You must be Neville Longbottom."

"Er, yes Ms. Jorkins," he said nervously, "and this is our friend, Hermione Granger."

"It's good to meet you as well," Bertha said, putting more candy in their cauldrons, completely filling them. "I must admit I'm surprised to find wizarding children out trick-or-treating."

"My parents are muggles," said Hermione, "So I've been going since before I knew I was a witch. I simply invited my friends to come too."

"I see," she said, "Well, Happy Halloween."

"Thank you, Miss Jorkins," said Harry politely as they left.

"Happy Halloween," said Neville.

"It was a pleasure to meet you," added Hermione.

"Likewise," said Bertha as the kids walked away toward Mr. and Mrs. Granger.

"Guess what mum, dad," said Hermione excitedly.

"What, honey?" said her mum.

“That lady in there is a witch! She recognized our Hogwarts robes, and then Harry’s scar. She works for the Ministry of Magic.

“Really?” said Mr. Granger. “I didn’t think witches and wizards lived in muggle neighborhoods.”

“Many do,” said Neville. “There’s simply not enough room in wizarding villages for everyone, so many just live alongside muggles, especially muggleborns.”

“Is that what she is?” asked Mrs. Granger.

“She didn’t say,” answered Harry.

“Well, I guess it doesn’t matter anyway,” she said, “but what does matter is that all your cauldrons are full.”

“Which means it’s time to get you boys back home,” added Mr. Granger.

“Do we have to?” asked Harry, causing the adults to chuckle.

“I’m afraid so. Let’s go.”

-

A half-hour later, Harry and Neville came out of the floo in James Potter’s office. They’d driven to the Leaky Cauldron, and after thanking the Grangers, flooed to the castle. As Harry was dusting himself off, he heard a strange voice.

“I smell blood. Let me bite you and rip you. Let me eat you!”

“Who said that?” he asked with his eyes bulged out.

“Said what?” asked Neville.

“I just heard a voice. It said it wants to eat someone. It was coming from that direction.”

He ran out of the office, followed by a confused Neville. At every crossroad, he’d stop and listen, and then he’d choose his direction.

They finally found themselves near a girls' toilet, where they found a message written in what appeared to be blood.

'The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the heir, Beware.'

"Harry," said a very shaky voice beside him. "Isn't that Mrs. Norris?"

As Harry followed Neville's gaze to the petrified cat, a crowd began to gather around them.

"You killed my cat!" shouted Mr. Filch from the front of the crowd. "I'll kill you for it!"

"You will not!" shouted Alice Potter from behind him.

"We didn't do it!"

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 22 – Hogwarts Is No Longer Safe

“All students, back to your dormitories,” came Dumbledore’s voice from behind Filch as more students and teachers arrived. When they started walking away, the headmaster turned to the caretaker. “Mr. Filch, what makes you believe that these two boys attacked your cat?”

Filch turned a bit pale, but managed to say, “Well, they...were looking at Mrs. Norris when I found them. You saw what they wrote on the wall!”

“Did you see them write on the wall?” asked James Potter coldly.

“Well, no, but...”

“Did you find some evidence that they wrote it?” asked Alice, glaring at Filch.

The caretaker appeared to have gotten hot under the collar. Dumbledore was examining the cat.

“So, you want to punish these boys for finding your filthy cat with no evidence at all!” said Minerva McGonagall. “I suppose next you’ll say that they’re the ones who flooded that girls’ toilet.” She indicated the water on the floor that led to the entrance of Moaning Myrtle’s home.

“Mrs. Norris is not filthy!”

“And she’s also not dead,” said Dumbledore. “She has been petrified, though how I cannot say. One thing is clear. No child did this. Whatever spell was performed on Mrs. Norris is not even taught here.”

“Professor Potter has been teaching those kids all sorts of spells on weekends,”

“Are you accusing me, now?”

Filch actually trembled at the menacing look James Potter was giving him. Alice put her hand on her husband’s shoulder, calming him a bit.

The hateful squib saw everyone looking at him expectantly. "That boy somehow stopped You-Know-Who. Who knows what dark magic..."

"MY MUM STOPPED VOLDEMORT!" shouted Harry angrily, with a hint of pride in his voice.

Filch was getting nervous. "I, er, didn't see them at the feast."

"They were with their friend Hermione," said Alice.

"Yeah," said Neville. "We'd just gotten back when Harry said..." He looked at his brother uncertainly.

"When I said I fancied a walk around the castle. We'd just come across Mrs. Norris when Mr. Filch found us and started threatening us."

After shooting a quick glare at Filch, Dumbledore turned his attention toward Madam Sprout. "I realize we don't have any mandrakes at the school, but need some to make a potion to revive Mrs. Norris. Do you know of any supplier that has a mature batch?"

She looked deep in thought. "I'm not sure, but I can floo a few suppliers tomorrow to find out."

"I believe it would be prudent to order a dozen, just in case there are more attacks of this nature." He then turned to the potions master. "Mrs. Potter, I assume that you are familiar with the potion of which I am speaking."

"Of course," she said with a smile. Then in a voice low enough for just her family to hear, she added, "Although it seems a waste to kill a poor mandrake just to revive that horrid feline."

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The next day, Filch was unhappy to learn that the very soonest they could receive the mandrakes would be late January, and it was more likely that it would be February.

“At least Filch will be able to spend Valentine’s Day with Mrs. Norris,” said James in mock relief when he heard the news.

-

Despite the lack of concern for the petrified cat, James and Alice forbid their kids from roaming the halls until the culprit was found, meeting much resistance. Even Hermione wasn’t allowed to wander the castle with them after their Saturday lessons. Fortunately, they were still allowed to visit the Burrow.

“Come on, Harry!” said Ron as he ran to the house for lunch. Ron, Harry, Neville, Hermione, and Ginny had been outside throwing gnomes over the fence.

As Harry turned to leave, he heard a voice saying, “I must find a home without these pests bothering me.”

Harry stopped dead in his tracks and looked around. “Who said that?”

“Ron did,” said Hermione. “We’d better go inside.”

“No. There was something else.”

“When will you be leaving so I can escape?” said the voice.

“There!” Harry said, pointing toward a bush next to Hermione.

She bent down to look under it. “You see. There’s noth....Ahhh!” She slowly backed away with a very scared expression on her pale face.

Harry looked where his friend had and saw a small garden snake. “Uh-oh,” it hissed, “the ugly ones have found me. Must escape before they...”

“How can I understand you?” said Harry while Hermione’s eyes went wide. “I can’t be a, a Parselmouth.”

The snake looked Harry in the eyes. “You speak the language?”

“You can understand me? But how?”

“Yes I understand you. I don’t know how, but you could help me if you wish. I would like to go where no one will hurt me, but the one’s here throw the gnomes over the structure. I am afraid that they will throw me as well if they see me.”

“Do you want me to take you outside the Weasley’s backyard? Er, to the other side of the, er, structure?”

“Yes, if you would.” Harry lowered his hand to allow the snake to crawl on his arm as Hermione continued to stare at him.

“My name is Harry, by the way,” he said to the snake.

“I am called Zerpini.”

They made small talk until Harry went outside the gate just far enough to drop off his new friend and came back in.

“You’re a Parselmouth,” said Hermione.

“I, I guess so. I didn’t know until now. Please don’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t,” she promised.

“Thanks. I don’t want everyone at Hogwarts thinking I’m the Heir of Slytherin.”

“That is scary. What’s happening there. ‘Hogwarts, a History’ talks about the legend of the Chamber of Secrets. It says that Slytherin was such a bigot he left a monster in it to kill all the muggleborn students.

“Let’s go inside the house.”

-

Weeks went by without another attack. Neither Harry nor Neville told anyone about the voice Harry had heard, and Hermione hadn’t told anyone about Harry’s conversation with a snake. Percy seemed even more withdrawn than usual.

One day in late November, the Potter family was walking toward their quarters after dinner when they came across the strangest sight they'd ever seen in the halls of Hogwarts. The Bloody Baron was floating upside down, petrified. Behind him were two stiff students, lying down on the floor holding hands. The first was a girl that had long blonde hair that Harry recognized as Charlie's new girlfriend Sarah-something. The other was a boy with red hair.

"Charlie!" shouted Harry as he and Neville ran toward him.

"Are they petrified like Mrs. Norris?" asked Neville.

"It looks like it," said Alice with a very worried expression on her face.

"I'll get them to the hospital wing. Alice, get the boys back to our quarters."

About that time, people started arriving in that area.

"You see!" shouted Filch triumphantly, "The whole bloody family is in on it!"

James lost control of his temper and punched Filch in the mouth. He fell backwards into the wall and collapsed. "I'm sick of your stupid accusations! I don't know why Dumbledore keeps you here! You're not even a good janitor!"

"My reasons are my own, James," said Dumbledore as he helped Filch up, "Although I do believe that Mr. Filch should restrain himself from making baseless accusations. Perhaps you could tell me what happened."

"We were walking toward our quarters when we came upon this scene. I was going to take them to the hospital wing while my wife took our boys home."

"Excellent suggestion. I shall help you."

"Alice, would you mind flooing Molly?"

"Of course, James."

While James and Albus were tending to the petrified, Alice was taking her terrified boys away from that scene. Just before they were out of earshot, they heard a few Slytherins talking. "Sarah Womack is just a mudblood, but Weasley is a pureblood! I thought that the Heir could tell the difference!"

"But when you hold hands with one of them, you end up smelling like a mudblood."

"Shut up!" said Bill Weasley as he pushed his way through the crowd toward his brother, "or I'll put you in detention!" he added, showing his Prefect badge.

Dumbledore interrupted that by saying, "All prefects, except Mr. Weasley, escort the students quickly to their dormitories. Mr. Weasley may accompany us to the hospital wing. It would seem Hogwarts is no longer safe."

Nobody saw a lonely red-headed first-year come to himself on a different floor carrying an old book and wondering how he got where he was. He wouldn't find out about Charlie until he got back to the Gryffindor common room.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 23 – Putting the Clues Together

An hour later, the hospital wing was filled with redheads. Arthur, Molly, Bill, Charlie (petrified on a bed), Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny all were in the room with Poppy, Albus, James, and Alice (and Sarah Womack, Charlie's petrified girlfriend). They had been unable to separate the young couple's hands, so they were in beds that had been moved close together. Molly didn't like bringing her younger children, but didn't have a babysitter so she had no choice. Her four youngest children looked terrified and Bill looked upset. She was currently berating the headmaster.

"How could YOU let this happen!?! This is supposed to be the safest place in Europe, but my Charlie has been attacked!"

"Molly, we are doing everything we possibly..."

At that moment the door opened, and a very pale red-haired boy entered, holding Professor McGonagall's hand. The little boy looked like he wanted to cry but was being stubborn.

"I wasn't in that part of the castle. I didn't know until Professor McGonagall told me when I got back to Gryffindor Tower."

"That's alright, Percy," said Mrs. Weasley, walking over and hugging him. "I'm just glad you're safe."

-

The next Saturday, just after the underage lesson ended, Hermione, who was supposed to leave right after the lesson because of the trouble at the school, said, "Before I floo home, could I use the loo?"

"Sure," said Alice, "but I'll escort you."

"Honestly, Professor Potter, I can..."

"I know, but we promised your parents we'd watch you. The students here have that restriction, too."

Silently resigning, she walked up to Alice and took her hand. "Shall we go?"

They silently walked out the doorway of the defense classroom.

"Can we please take the stairs up one level? I don't really want to go to the closest one."

Alice giggled. "Of course, dear. I don't think anyone wants to use the loo with Moaning Myrtle around."

"Thanks! That ghost is an absolute nightmare. Most of the other ghosts I've met are alright, but she's just intolerable. I wonder where she came from anyway. She obviously died while she was a student here. She appears the right age and is wearing Hogwarts robes."

"I actually don't have any idea. She was already haunting that bathroom when I was a student here." Alice sighed. "We'd be able to know approximately when she died if it weren't for the fact that Hogwarts robes haven't changed in five-hundred years."

"And that was requiring students to wear socks, according to 'Hogwarts, a History.'"

"Hello Professor Potter," said a tired-looking first-year Gryffindor with red hair who'd just rounded the corner and was walking past the two of them. He was accompanied by Professor McGonagall because of the new rules.

"Hello Mr. Weasley," said Alice cordially. "Hello Professor McGonagall."

"Hello, Percy," Hermione said politely, although it was obvious from her expression that she was not happy to see the git who'd insulted her when she was only trying to help him. She sounded much friendlier when she said, "Hello, Professor."

"Miss Granger," Percy said, not looking at her as he went past them, walking the direction they had come from.

"Hello, Miss Granger," said Minerva.

Hermione noticed that Percy was carrying the book Malfoy had given him. She remembered the name on it was Tom Riddle, and she thought she'd heard that name before. The brunette girl briefly contemplated mentioning the diary to her escort, but was interrupted from her thoughts by Alice announcing, "Here we are." Hermione forgot to bring up the diary before flooing home for the week.

-

A few weeks later, Harry was dueling Neville during one of the lessons. Harry's stepbrother was actually pretty good at dueling, but nowhere near Harry's level. They'd been at it for six minutes as the two Professor Potters watched with Hermione.

With sweat dripping from his forehead, the Longbottom heir shouted "Expelliarmus!"

The red beam shot toward the Boy-Who-Lived. He was about to move out of the way when he heard a voice say, "Must have blood! Must kill!" Before Harry knew it, his wand was in Neville's hand and he was lying on the floor five feet behind where he'd been standing.

He didn't notice Neville's excitement as he proclaimed, "I won! I finally won!" nor the others congratulating him on his accomplishment.

Harry got up and said, "Did you hear that voice?"

"What voice?" said the others together, although Neville looked worried.

"It wants to kill!" Harry shouted as he ran out the door, ignoring his parents' calls.

As James and Alice were running toward the door, Neville said, "He heard a voice like that when we found Filch's cat!"

"Stay here!" Alice shouted when the kids made to follow them. "Hermione, if we don't get back in fifteen minutes, floo home." With that said, she closed the door.

Hermione looked shocked. "He heard a voice like that before, and neither of you saw fit to tell me?"

Neville shrugged his shoulders nervously. "Harry, well, he asked me not to tell anyone. He was afraid you'd think he'd gone mental."

Her eyebrows moved closer together as she furrowed her brow in deep thought. "The way he talked about that voice was just like when he..." She closed her mouth.

"When he what?"

"I...he asked me not to say. I need to speak to him immediately."

"Okay. It seems Harry's got lots of secrets. I know he'd be really upset with you if you tell me."

"Thanks."

Twenty minutes later, James, Alice, and Harry returned looking very grim.

"Hermione," said Alice, "I thought we told you to go home. The school isn't safe."

"I'm sorry. I just had to find out what happened."

"A Hufflepuff sixth year named Marsha Wilcox has been petrified. This time we were the second ones to the scene. Percy Weasley found the girl. He's terribly shaken up," said James.

"P-Percy?" asked Hermione. "W-was he carrying that diary with him?" Both Harry and Neville seemed a bit upset.

"You mean that book he had with him the last time you saw him," asked Alice. When Hermione nodded, the Potions teacher said, "Yes. Why?"

"Draco Malfoy gave him the diary," said Neville coldly. "He said it was made by his uncle."

"Tom...something," said Harry.

“Riddle,” said Hermione. James and Alice’s eyes bulged out.

“When,” asked James.

“He got it just before my birthday party.”

“Before the attacks started,” said Harry with his head hung down. “Hermione tried to warn Percy that it might be cursed, but Neville and I didn’t want her too. We thought it was just a prank. Do you think it might...”

“Tom Riddle is Voldemort’s real name,” said James grimly. “The question is, how are you hearing that there’s gonna be an attack.”

Hermione walked over to Harry and whispered in his ear, “The way you reacted was just like when you heard that snake at the Weasleys. I think you should tell them.”

He looked coldly at her for a moment while the others stared at the pair. “Fine.” He took a deep breath. “You may be right.” He turned to his parents. “I, I’m a Parselmouth.” He ignored the gasps. “I was in the Weasley’s garden when I heard a voice. Hermione was with me and didn’t hear it. When I pointed to where the voice was coming from, she found a garden snake, and I talked to it.”

“Wow,” said James dumbly. “A Parselmouth.” He turned to Hermione. “So you think there’s some sort of snake that’s crawling around here doing the attacks, and that somehow a diary that Riddle made that Percy has is involved.”

“That would mean Voldemort is the heir of Slytherin,” said Alice.

“That part makes sense. Dumbledore did say that he was a student here the last time the attacks happened...”

“And that he supposedly caught the culprit,” finished Alice. “I need to go to the library and look up snakes.”

“Let me come, too!” pleaded Hermione.

“I’m sorry,” said James firmly. “You’ve been a big help, but you’ve got to go home. I promised your parents I’d keep you safe.”

“Fine,” she said as she walked toward the fireplace. “Bye everyone. Be careful.”

-

At the same time, Percy was pacing in the Gryffindor Common room. He’d suspected himself when he’d had those memory lapses at the exact times of the attacks, but this time he came to himself at the very scene of the crime. He knew he’d done it. Not only that, but he knew he’d attacked Charlie. He’d have run away from the scene today, but was found by Harry moments later. He told a story about finding the victim to the professors, but it was a lie and he knew it. Hermione’s warning about the diary was echoing in his ears. He fought back the tears as he looked between the diary and the fireplace before making his decision. He tossed the book into the flames.

-

There were a lot of people in the Gryffindor Common Room, but none of them were paying any attention to the first-year outcast. They didn’t see him throw a book into the fire, nor the blank expression that went on his face just before he quickly grabbed the book out of the flames. Bill, however, was walking downstairs when he saw his brother step out the portrait hole.

“Percy,” he called out from the top of the stairs, but got no reply. Knowing that the halls were not safe, Bill walked down the stairs as fast as he could. However, before he got to the doors, two second year boys started fighting and Bill had to break them up. By the time he got to the door, Percy was long gone. How he wished there was some way to call McGonagall from the Gryffindor Common room.

-

Harry and Neville, in the mean time, had been escorted to their quarters by their dad.

“Harry,” said James. “I know you have the Marauder’s map. I think now would be a good time to use it. We can start watching Percy to see if he’s going to this Chamber of Secrets. We’ll know because he’ll disappear off the map.”

Harry already knew his dad knew he had the map, so that didn’t surprise him. He ran into his room and got it. Soon James, Harry, and Neville were looking over the map for Percy.

“He’s not in Gryffindor Common room,” said Neville.

“I wish we’d designed it to look for individuals instead of to just show us if someone was in the halls. Maybe have a command for it to only show one person. Anyway, let’s keep looking.”

Fortunately for them, the hallways were mostly empty, so it didn’t take much effort besides flipping through the map to find him. “He’s near your classroom, dad,” said Harry, pointing his finger.

“He shouldn’t be alone,” said James. “All the students are supposed to be...hold on. Isn’t that the girls’ toilet he’s going into?”

“Er, I think so,” said Harry.

“Yeah,” said Neville. “Hermione told me about this depressed ghost that hangs out there, Moaning Myrtle I believe.”

“Why would he...what?” said Harry.

“He’s gone!” said James, stating the obvious.

“I think the entrance is there, and he’s in the Chamber of Secrets now,” said Harry.

“I’m gonna get your mother and check it out. You boys stay here.”

“Dad, you know that as soon as you leave we’re gonna follow.”

“Then I’ll call a dozen house elves to guard you.”

“What if you need a Parselmouth?”

“Then I’ll come get you! I don’t want you petrified or worse! Please stay here! Truby!”

Their house elf appeared. “Yes Professor Potter. Truby is being here! What is you wanting.”

“I need you to watch the boys and make sure they do not leave our quarters. Don’t leave them for any reason.”

“Yes Professor Potter.”

-

Fifteen minutes later, James found himself entering the library. He looked around and quickly spotted his wife immersed in a book. As he approached, he saw her smile for a moment and then pale.

“Alice?”

“Wha...oh James. The good news is that I think I found what kind of creature is here. The bad news is the same thing.”

“What did you find?”

“I think it’s a basilisk that’s been moving through the pipes.”

“A basilisk? I thought they were only legendary.”

“But it’s the only thing that makes sense. Looking directly at its eyes will kill anyone, while indirectly will petrify. The last girl had a compact in her hands. She must have seen it from behind. Others saw it through the Bloody Baron. Mrs. Norris must have seen its reflection in the puddle on the floor.”

“From Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom!”

“Yes. Why?”

“We just watched Percy disappear in that room on the map.”

“Where are the boys?”

"In our quarters with Truby."

"Should we get Dumbledore?"

James took a deep breath. "I ran into Minerva on the way here. She told me that Hagrid has been arrested by that idiot Fudge and that the board of governors have removed Dumbledore as headmaster. I think we should deal with this ourselves."

She closed her eyes for a moment. "Alright, but first we'll need these." She pulled out her wand and conjured two blindfolds and two mirrors. "We'll use the mirrors to look around the corners until we get there, and put on the blindfolds when we know the basilisk is with us. There's a spell that I think I'll be able to use against it. We'll keep the blindfolds around our necks for now."

-

Just before they reached the bathroom, they found the message, 'His body shall lie in the Chamber forever' written on the wall near the original message.

"I hope we're not too late," said Alice.

"So do I."

-

They slowly made their way into Myrtle's bathroom to find everything looked normal (for this particular room). The teenaged ghost was crying loudly and the faucets were all running. The sinks were filled and the water was flowing on the floor.

Alice decided to talk to the ghost. "Hello Myrtle. What happened to make you so upset?"

"This boy just came in and hissed something at the sinks. They moved and he jumped down a hole they revealed, and then they moved back! How dare he use my home as a doorway! You'd think he'd at least ask me, but no one cares about Moaning Myrtle's feelings, do they?"

James walked up to the sink and looked at each of the taps. He frowned when he noticed that one of them had a snake carved onto it. "I've found it, and it looks like we'll have to bring Harry along."

-

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 24 – Fighting the Snake

“What do you mean we’ll have to bring Harry along, James? Have you lost your mind?”

“Look at this,” James told his wife. “I believe it takes a Parselmouth to open the entrance.”

“Then we’ll leave him up here,” she said desperately.

“And then find out that we need to go back after we run into another door?”

“We don’t know that...”

“But I think you’ll agree that it’s likely,” pleaded James. “I don’t like this any more than you do.”

Sighing, Alice nodded her head. “I think we’ll have to stupefy Neville to get him to stay behind if Harry’s coming.”

“Or put him in the full body-bind,” said James with a small smile.

“But we can’t let him come with us,” pleaded Alice.

“I agree. I’d rather have him mad at us and safe than...”

“Yes.” She took a deep breath. “So we’re in agreement?”

Sighing, James nodded. “We take Harry and leave Neville behind.”

-

Ten minutes later, the door to the Potters’ quarters opened, revealing James and Alice standing outside the door.

“Truby is keeping the boys here just like you is telling Truby,” declared the house elf, who was standing in front of a couch that were sitting on, looking extremely irritated.

“Thank you, Truby,” said Alice. “Now you’ll just have to keep Neville here. We need to bring Harry.”

At the same moment, Harry shouted, "Yes!" while Neville shouted, "What?"

James looked at both boys, who were still seated. "I wish we didn't have to take either of you, but we need a Parselmouth, and Harry's the only one available. The creature down there is a basilisk, and can kill you if you see its eyes."

"Wh-what?" asked both Harry and Neville together.

Alice took a deep breath and squatted down to look into Harry's eyes, and put her hands on his shoulders. "Harry, I'm not going to lie to you. It will be dangerous. I'll conjure you a blindfold to wear down there so that won't happen, but I can't promise that you won't be in danger. We'll do our best to protect you. I understand if you don't want to come, but..."

"Percy will die if I don't, and maybe other people too." With a determined look in his eyes, the Chosen One said, "Let's go."

-

Ten minutes later, James, Alice, and Harry were standing at the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets. Myrtle had thankfully left, so she wasn't annoying them. Harry's mum had conjured a blindfold that was around his neck, waiting to be pulled over his eyes at a moment's notice. Harry looked at the carving of a snake and hissed, "Open."

All three of them stepped back and watched in wonder as the sinks began to move around until they revealed the hole. Harry took a step forward until his dad said, "I'll go first. If you don't hear from me in five minutes, tell Minerva to evacuate the school." He pulled his blindfold on and jumped down the hole after his wife silently nodded.

Alice and Harry didn't have to wait a full minute before they heard James' voice calling up at them. "All clear! Come on down!"

Harry ran ahead of his mum and jumped without putting on his blindfold. He slid down a lot farther than he'd imagined he would until he finally landed, falling face-down on a floor full of rat bones. He got

up very quickly when he realized what he was lying on. "Gross!" he muttered just as Alice landed gracefully on her feet.

"Harry James Potter!" she yelled, "You should have waited for me to go down!"

"And be left alone in the loo? No thanks!"

James shook his head. "We don't have time to argue. Harry, Alice, put on your blindfolds." He pulled out a mirror. "Whenever we turn a corner, I'll look through this mirror. We'll walk hand-in-hand with me in the front, Mum in the back, and Harry in the middle."

They complied and soon began the long trek through the tunnel silently walking toward what they knew to be a very dangerous situation. After a while, James said, "We're walking around a snakeskin. By the size of it, the basilisk must be huge." Harry couldn't help but feel butterflies fill his stomach.

Harry felt his father stop just before he said, "Harry, I'll need you to say something in Parseltongue."

"I have to see a snake to do it," he answered.

James was no expert on snake language, so he wasn't about to question his son on this. "Fine. Pull off your blindfold long enough to open the door, but then turn around and put the blindfold back on."

Harry carefully uncovered his eyes and put his glasses (which had been in his pocket) back on and examined the entrance to the chamber. He looked at one of the perfectly carved serpents and hissed at it, and the door started moving.

"Turn around," said James, as he did the same. Harry put the blindfold back on (removing his glasses) while James pulled out his mirror to look at the reflection of the Chamber of Secrets.

"What do you see, James?" asked Alice, who still was wearing her blindfold.

"There are a lot of carvings of huge snake heads on the sides. I wonder if each is another door. At the end is an enormous ugly face. I think it's Salazar Slytherin. And...wait a minute. I can see Percy lying on the floor. Stay here."

Harry heard his dad run for a short amount of time and then stop suddenly. A male voice that seemed oddly familiar said, "He's not dead, but only just."

"Who are you?" asked Harry's dad.

"Just a memory. My name is Tom Riddle."

Harry tensed up instantly, and felt his mum wrap both hands around him as James Potter barked, "Voldemort!"

"Oh, yes. Percy's written about you, Professor Potter. I was so hoping to meet your son, Harry."

James suddenly realized what he was facing. "You're a Horcrux!" he muttered.

Tom was startled. "You're a lot more clever than that silly little boy thought. As pathetic as he is though, he has proven useful. His life is..."

"...giving you a life of your own." James, whose wand was already in his hand, was sick of chatting with this soul fragment. He pointed his wand at the sixteen-year-old version of Voldemort, and silently fired a reducto hex.

Tom moved the side quickly, avoiding getting hit as he pulled a wand out of his pocket. He smirked at James. "I figured that Percy wouldn't be needing it anymore. Avada Kadavra!" A green beam of light at Mr. Potter, who quickly dodged out of the way, his auror reflexes kicking in.

If Harry hadn't been blindfolded, he'd have been amazed at the light show that was taking place on the other side of the chamber, as the two master duelists battled it out. They didn't bother with shields, since neither was using spells that could be easily blocked. For ten

minutes the two were locked in combat as Alice and Harry stayed silent in the shadows.

“Why can’t we help?” whispered Harry.

“Because your father can’t be distracted by watching us. If we went out there, he might lose his concentration.”

“But you were an auror. You can...”

“I have to make sure you get out of here safely!” she whispered.

“But he killed my mum!”

“I know. But what doesn’t make sense is that a Horcr...stay here!”

“What?” asked Harry.

Alice shouted loudly for her husband to hear, “Find the object – probably that diary! That’s what you need to destroy – not the boy!”

-

James ducked from the latest hex as he processed what he’d been told and realized he’d been acting like a vengeful idiot. He glanced down at Percy and saw the book in the boy’s hands and pointed his wand at the Horcrux.

“No!” shouted Tom as he fired a silent stunner at James. He couldn’t risk taking the time to speak the killing curse.

James saw the incoming red spell coming at him a moment too late. He moved his wand to produce a shield silently, but wasn’t quick enough. He fell unconscious next to Percy.

“So much for your champion!” sneered Riddle toward the back of the chamber. “Mrs. Potter, I presume. Oh, and your stepson, Harry.” Riddle pointed his wand at the seven-year-old boy and he was pulled away, off his feet, from Alice toward the madman. “You may leave, Alice Potter,” Tom said quietly as Alice pulled down her blindfold. “I have no use for you.”

At that moment, Alice pointed her wand at Voldemort and fired a silent Expelliarmus hex just below her son, who was still flying through the air toward Riddle. Harry's body blocked his view, so Tom didn't see it coming until it hit him, causing his wand to fly out of his hand at least fifty feet. The spell dropped Harry in the center of the chamber.

"You foolish girl!" said a very upset Tom Marvolo Riddle. "You have dared to challenge the Heir of Slytherin!" He turned toward the statue of Slytherin and hissed in the language that both he and Harry understood, "Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts four."

"You mean most insane!" shouted Harry in English as the statue's mouth began opening.

Alice shouted, "Harry, keep your blindfold on!" as she pulled her own back on.

Harry could hear Tom give the basilisk orders while he got up and slowly started walking toward his mum's voice, which isn't that easy to do blindfolded.

He increased his pace as he heard the huge snake slithering behind him until Alice shouted an incantation he'd never heard, "Lumos Solaris!"

He heard both Riddle and the snake scream as some light even got through his blindfold. The snake screamed much longer than Riddle as Harry continued his journey. As Tom shouted, "You may have blinded the basilisk, but it can still smell you!" Harry stepped on something that caused him to trip and fall on his face.

"Kill the boy!" he heard Riddle hiss to the serpent, "He's right beneath you!" It was then that he noticed that the light from his mum's spell was gone. Taking Riddle's word that the snake was blind, he pulled off his blindfold. Squinting without his glasses, he saw that he'd tripped on a wand, so he grabbed it and turned around. He shouted, "Expelliarmus!" sending a beam of red light at the basilisk's body. It hit right on target, but reflected back.

Harry rolled over as Alice shouted, "No!"

Harry realized that he needed a powerful spell and racked his brain, trying to remember one that his dad had told him about, warning him not to use it in a friendly duel – only if his life was in danger. ‘Reduce...no...reduck...no,’ he thought, as he saw the blind snake open its jaws. He wanted to vomit when drool fell onto his jeans. He pointed his wand into the open mouth that was coming toward him and shouted, “Reducto!”

A powerful beam shot out of his wand, into the open mouth, and straight through its head, which fell backwards. Harry got up and ran toward Alice as the beast began to spasm.

Riddle was beyond furious. “You may have killed my pet, but I will kill you!”

Alice said, “Get out of here, Harry,” as she ran past her son toward Percy. She grabbed the diary out of his hands, and then through it back on the floor, aiming her wand at it.

“What are you doing?” Tom shouted as Alice cast a spell that set the diary, which already had a few burn marks from the Gryffindor fireplace, on fire. As the flames quickly spread from page to page, Riddle was screaming in pain as his face and body began to melt before her eyes until finally the diary was ashes and Tom was gone.

She walked over to her husband and revived him as Percy’s eyes opened. He looked around and saw the dead basilisk along with his Potions and Defense teachers. The eleven-year-old boy started crying uncontrollably. “It was me. I, I didn’t mean to...Riddle made me. Hermione warned me. Tom said he’d help me become powerful. I thought I was so smart, but I was so stupid. I wanted to be a prefect so badly, and now I’m getting expelled. I nearly killed Charlie and everybody else.”

He sobbed for a few minutes as Alice Potter walked over and hugged him. “Tom’s gone now. So is the basilisk.”

“How did you kill the snake?” asked James as he got up.

“I didn’t,” said Alice with a grin, “Harry did.”

Both James' and Percy's eyes bulged out. "Harry did that?" asked James.

"Yes. I performed a spell that blinded the basilisk, and Harry shot a reducto curse into its mouth through its head. It was about to bite him at the time."

"Where is he now?" asked James.

"I told him to..."

"I'm right here," Harry called out. They looked to see he was running toward them.

"I thought I told you to get out of here, young man," she said with a small smile.

"I did. I walked out the door and stayed to see what would happen.

-

A little while later, they had reached the entrance to the chamber when James noticed a problem. He looked at Percy, who was still shaken up. "You don't happen to remember how to get out of here, do you?"

"N-No P-Professor."

Harry and the others looked around for a clue. "Look over here, Harry," said Alice after about thirty seconds.

He grinned as he eyed the carving of yet another serpent. "Take us up," he hissed in Parseltongue as Percy's eyes widened.

Suddenly the four of them were lifted as though someone had put a powerful vacuum at the other end of the hole. They were sucked up even faster than they'd slid down the slimy pipe and fell on the floor of Myrtle's bathroom.

"Y-You're a Parselmouth!" said Percy.

“Good thing, too,” said James. “If he weren’t, you’d be dead right now and Voldemort would have returned.”

Shaking, Percy said, “S-s-sorry.”

“Er,” said Harry, “Would you mind trying to keep this a secret? I know that a few teachers will have to find out, and maybe your family. But I don’t want it spread around.”

“N-n-no problem.”

-

Together, they marched to Professor McGonagall’s office, where they were surprised to see that Dumbledore was sitting, along with Arthur, Molly, Ron, and Ginny.

“Percy!” shouted Mrs. Weasley as she saw her son enter, followed by the Potters. “How can I ever thank you James, and Alice?”

“It wasn’t just us,” said Alice. “Harry here killed the basilisk that’s been attacking students.”

“Harry?” repeated McGonagall and all the Weasleys as the boy in question turned red and tried to hide behind his mum. Dumbledore simply smiled without any surprise registering on his face.

“Perhaps you would honor us with the tale,” suggested Albus.

“Actually,” said Alice, “I think it would be easier to show you. Why don’t we use your Pensieve?”

“An excellent suggestion,” agreed the headmaster. “Let’s all go to my office.”

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Forty-five minutes later, they’d all finished watching the memory play out in the Pensieve. Mrs. Weasley hadn’t wanted the young children to go in there, but they begged, claiming that if Harry could live through it, they could watch it. When James had expressed concern,

Dumbledore assured them that looking at the memory of a basilisk couldn't harm them any more than standing in the way of the memory of a spell.

Dumbledore looked at Percy, who was squirming and trying to hide behind his mother. "There will be no punishment. Older and more experienced wizards than you have been hoodwinked by Voldemort before, but I hope you've learned a valuable lesson."

Percy looked between Dumbledore and his dad. "Never trust anything that can think if you can't see where it keeps its brain."

"Yes, and that you should try to listen to your friends who are trying to help you."

"I know. If I'd listened to Hermione, none of this would've happened."

Dumbledore then looked at Harry. "If you were a student, I would've awarded two-hundred points to whichever house you ended up in, but alas, I cannot. I can, however, give you an award for special services to the school, and may I add that you'll be the youngest recipient ever."

Harry was blushing again. "Thank you, sir. But if you're rewarding me, you should reward Hermione, also. She realized that it was a snake."

Alice smiled. "He does have a point. If she hadn't put the clues together, we would've all died in the chamber when the basilisk was released."

With a twinkle in his eye, Dumbledore said, "I believe you're right. I shall also give Miss Granger the same award. We'll be notifying her in a few days. You may wish to write her sooner. For now, I believe that dinner is still being served."

As they all made their way down the stairs to go to the Great Hall (Alice went to get Neville), Ginny caught up to Harry. "Thanks for helping to save Percy's life. You were amazing." She then kissed him on the cheek, causing his whole face to turn Gryffindor red, and walked past him.

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 25 – Sharing the Memory

While James got Neville, Alice escorted Harry to the Great Hall for dinner. Just before they got there, Harry asked her, “Mum, what’s gonna happen to Mrs. Malfoy and Draco?”

She pulled him into a nearby classroom and shut the door. She bent down and looked in her eyes. “Well, she’s probably going to be arrested and have a trial. Percy will have to testify about Draco giving him the book.” She then closed her eyes for a moment. “You, Neville, and Hermione might also have to testify. Do you understand what that means?”

“Yes. I go to court and answer questions.”

She smiled. “Exactly. You just tell them the truth. But we can talk about that later tonight. Your father and brother are probably already at the feast.”

They soon arrived in the Great Hall and found that Alice was right. They sat beside the rest of the family. As Harry sat next to Neville, he saw that his stepbrother was looking straight ahead, ignoring him. His arms were crossed in front of him.

“Neville,” he whispered, getting no response. “Come on. What are you mad at me for?”

“You know why I’m mad,” he hissed back, still looking straight ahead.

“Because I went with mum and dad? What should I have done? What would you have done?”

“I’d have refused to go until they let you come too.”

“While Percy was dying? It wouldn’t have worked anyway. You heard that they didn’t want me to come but had to...”

“I know! I know! You’re the Parselmouth, the Boy-Who...”

“Shut up! You know I don’t want that!”

“Be quiet, both of you!” said Alice with a look that they knew better than to argue with.

Dumbledore chose that moment to stand up and walk to his podium. “Good evening everyone. I have excellent news. The two Professors Potters, along with their son Harry and his friend Hermione Granger, have located the long-hidden Chamber of Secrets and disposed of the monster within, which incidentally was a basilisk. Therefore, the restrictions placed upon you for protection are no longer necessary.” There was a lot of applause at that announcement. “Unfortunately, the basilisk victims still won’t be revived until late January at the earliest, but there will be no more attacks. For now, Tuck in.”

Dinner that night was a very cheerful event once the food appeared, but Neville did seem mad at his family and wouldn’t speak unless spoken to. When they finally got to their quarters, James and Alice decided to settle it.

“Neville, I’m sorry that you felt left out of facing a basilisk and Voldemort, but that’s no reason to have a pity party.”

“We didn’t want to bring your brother with us, but we had no choice,” said Alice patiently. “It’s not his fault that we had to take him with, and it’s unfair of you to be mad at him.”

“And the reason we didn’t take you is because it wasn’t safe,” added James. “As it is, he, along with your mother and I, almost died tonight.”

Neville seemed a bit humbled by that. “Could you tell me what happened?”

“Could we show him like we did the Weasleys and everyone?” asked Harry.

James wanted to make sure Neville realized just how serious this ‘adventure’ had been, and thought the Pensieve would be the best method. “Truby.”

The little elf appeared. “You is wanting Truby, Master Potter?”

“Yes. Could you pop over to Professor Dumbledore’s office and ask if we can borrow his Pensieve?”

“Of course, sir.” The house elf disappeared in another pop. Thirty seconds later she was back with the Pensieve, and the memory was still in there. Neville went in with Alice.

When the two of them came out of it, Harry and James were playing a game of chess. Neville looked very frightened and was holding onto his mother. He let go of her and walked up to Harry. “I, I’m sorry for what I said. You...”

“It’s alright, Neville. I understand.”

“I don’t know how you could even think with that monster about to eat you!”

“I’m sure you could do the same thing.”

-

Neville doubted that was true. He was truthfully very impressed with how Harry had killed the snake. Harry wrote a letter to Hermione about what had happened, but Neville looked at it before it was sent off and added, *“Harry is really downplaying how he killed the basilisk. Demand to see the memory! Harry was incredible, and so were mum and dad!”*

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In the week that followed, James, along with Sirius and Remus who visited Hogwarts, added the Chamber of Secrets to the Marauders’ Map while Harry and Neville watched in awe. Alice seemed to be getting ill. Hermione (along with her parents) was very pleased to receive an award for special services to the school. She was given one copy of the trophy while the school kept the other. James proudly displayed his son’s trophy in their living room.

Dumbledore informed them that Narcissa Malfoy (who had been applying for a teaching position when she visited Hogwarts) had been arrested and Draco was put in the wizarding equivalent of juvenile

hall pending the outcome of the trial. While she was being arrested, she tried to escape, and part of her robes ripped off during the struggle and was caught by one of the Malfoy house elves. He happily exclaimed, "Dobby is free!" and disappeared with a pop. This distraction allowed the aurors to stun Narcissa.

The trial was scheduled in the middle of February. The Ministry wanted to give the basilisk victims time to recover so that they could offer testimony. They wanted to make sure that the charges against Narcissa stuck.

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Percy made his way to James Potter's office, where he knew Hermione was having a lesson with the Potters' kids. It was a week after the basilisk was killed. He knocked on the door with his head hung down.

"Hello Mr. Weasley," said James cheerfully when he opened the door.

"Er, Hello Professor Potter. I, er, was hoping that I could talk to Hermione for a minute." His legs were fidgeting about nervously.

"Of course, Percy," the girl in question answered, walking toward him.

"We can take a break," said James. "Don't be long."

Once they'd walked into a nearby empty room, Percy said rather quickly, "I know that when you warned me about the diary you were only trying to help and it turned out you were right, so..." He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry for what I said."

"That's alright, Percy. You were rather harsh, but I think you'd been having a rough term and took it out on me. But I think you've paid more than enough for it."

"No," he said with his head hung down. "I thought I was smarter than you. That I was better than you and everybody, and I ended up proving that I'm the stupidest. I nearly killed my own brother."

Hermione wasn't sure what to say to that, so she changed the subject. "I should probably be getting back."

-

Hermione returned and they continued the lesson. Afterward, she asked to see the memory of the Chamber of Secrets. She watched the entire incident intently, and when she exited the Pensieve, she looked at the two Professor Potters.

"What's a Horcrux?"

The two adults looked at each other nervously. Finally James spoke. "A Horcrux is a very evil dark magic that we don't talk about."

"You said the diary was one. It's something Voldemort made," said Harry.

"Forget about Horcruxes," said Alice, "and don't ask anybody else about them! You'll end up in a lot of trouble."

"Not just from us," said James. "They are one of the most evil dark objects there are, and anybody you ask that does know about them will think you or your mother and I are evil." He turned to Harry. "Asking about a Horcrux is worse than talking to a snake as far as what people will think of you."

"If you don't want us asking others, then you have to tell us yourselves," said Neville.

James looked in Neville's eyes, Harry's eyes, and finally Hermione's eyes. "I suppose if I don't tell you, Hermione will send an owl to Flourish and Blotts for any books on Horcruxes they might carry."

"James, we can't..."

"Alice, our only other choice is to obliviate them, and I'm not willing to do that."

Taking a deep breath, Alice said, "Fine, but you kids can't tell anyone about this, ever. Is that clear?"

“Yes,” they all answered.

James gave the basic explanation of Horcruxes to the kids, and mentioned that the diary was the third one they’d destroyed, and that they believed there were three more. Harry immediately remembered when James was hurt from the ring, and they explained to him what had really happened.

-

School was let out for the holidays, and the Potters spent Christmas with Augusta Longbottom. She’d accepted Harry as another grandchild, but, though she wouldn’t admit it, she never seemed to like James that much. He suspected she thought he was replacing Frank. Harry wondered what it was like at the Burrow with Charlie still petrified and Percy feeling responsible.

At dinner, Alice made an announcement that surprised everyone except James. “I, that is, we, um...” She looked at James to continue.

“We’re having a baby.”

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 26 – The Verdict

“What?” asked Harry and Neville at the same time.

Mrs. Longbottom had a neutral expression on her face. “Congratulations,” she said blandly.

“Another marauder,” said Harry with an evil grin.

“*She* will not be a marauder,” declared Alice.

“At least, not when *his* mother’s around,” added James playfully.

The boys looked confused. “Will it be a boy or girl?” asked Neville.

“We don’t know, yet,” said Alice.

“I hope it’s a little brother,” said Harry, “so we can show him...” He noticed his mum’s expression, “how to behave properly.”

“And eat all his vegetables,” said Neville.

“And clean his room properly.” Harry looked thoughtful for a moment. “Are we gonna need new quarters?”

-

On and on the conversation went from there, discussing different changes in their lives that would occur because of the baby. Both boys made it clear that they had no intention of changing diapers, and were relieved when they were assured they wouldn’t have to. Mrs. Longbottom seemed a bit sad until Alice and James made it clear that they wanted the baby to think of her as its grandmother. They said it was especially important since both James’ and Alice’s parents were dead so the child wouldn’t have any grandparents without her.

-

The rest of the holiday break went by quickly, and before long, the students had returned to Hogwarts. During the first week of classes, Harry was talking to Neville while their parents were teaching and Truby was guarding the door.

“Nev?”

“Yeah?”

“I’ve been thinking about the pranks we played on Percy last year.”

Neville took a deep breath. “So have I. I wonder if wouldn’t have written so much in that stupid book if we hadn’t humiliated him so much.”

Harry looked deep in thought. “I don’t know. The Gryffindors already didn’t like him, but I suppose that’s different than being made a fool of. The trouble is, he did deserve the pranks. I’m sorry about how he started writing in that diary, but he was acting like a prat, and therefore needed to be taught a lesson. I can’t make myself be sorry about our pranks.”

“I guess the prank just got more out of hand than we intended,” agreed Neville. “I guess we’ll have to make sure that our next targets don’t have worse consequences than we intended.”

“Yeah. I remember that my dad once told me about a prank he, Uncle Sirius, and Uncle Remus played that got out of hand and ended up with a kid dying.”

Neville looked shocked. “What happened?”

“Dad wouldn’t tell me. He just said that even though the kid was a git and a bigot, and deserved to have a prank pulled on him, he didn’t deserve to be killed. I think his name was Snape. After that happened, both Moony and Padfoot were expelled and dad got punished real bad but wasn’t expelled.”

“Wow. I wonder if we should apologize to Percy.”

“If we did that, what do you think he’d do? Honestly?” said Harry.

Sighing, Neville admitted, “Turn us in to Dumbledore and get our parents in trouble.”

“Not to mention telling all the teachers that we’re pranksters so that they’ll start suspecting us of everything.”

“Maybe the apology would do more harm than good.”

-

They resolved not to let Percy know it was them who’d pranked him, but also decided not to ever prank him again. Percy looked very sad when they saw him sitting at the Gryffindor table during mealtimes. Sometimes Bill would sit with him, and other times he’d sit alone. They wondered just how bad it must have been to spend Christmas at the Burrow while Charlie was petrified at Hogwarts. However, neither one of them could bring themselves to ask any of the Weasleys that question when they visited next.

-

January seemed to fly by and before they knew it, the mandrakes arrived and Alice Potter made the potion so that the basilisk victims were finally revived. Percy was there along with the families of all the victims.

When Charlie was revived, he and his girlfriend both blushed furiously when they realized they’d been holding hands for months. Percy started crying and apologizing as he hugged his big brother until his mum took over the hug, nearly breaking Charlie’s ribs. He then backed up and faced all the victims and their families.

“I, I think all of you families know the part I played in this. I wanted to say...I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for this to happen.” He then ran out of the hospital wing crying. The families had been told about the diary, except that it was a Horcrux, and that Mrs. Malfoy was going to be tried for getting her son to give it to Percy so he’d be possessed and open the Chamber of Secrets.

“Tell him we understand that it wasn’t his fault,” said one of the parents as Mr. Weasley followed Percy. Filch, who was holding Mrs. Norris in his hands, looked like he was going to disagree until Dumbledore gave him a stern look.

Fifteen minutes later, Arthur had returned, saying that Percy had gone to bed, but he'd delivered the message.

-

Before long, it was time for Mrs. Malfoy's trial. Harry unfortunately realized that it was unlikely that he'd be able to keep his Parseltongue ability hidden during the trial, but hoped he was mistaken. He was one of the first witnesses. After he was sworn in, the questions began.

"Mr. Potter, is it true that you saw Draco Malfoy at Hogwarts on the day in question?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do when you noticed him?"

"Well, I was with my stepbrother Neville and our friend Hermione when we saw him, and we followed him from a distance."

"Why?"

"Well, Draco's dad killed Neville's dad, so he wanted to keep an eye on him."

The judge quickly said, "While Lucius Malfoy is in fact serving a life sentence in Azkaban for several crimes, including the murder of Frank Longbottom, that is not to be taken into account in establishing the guilt or innocence of Narcissa Malfoy and her son."

Harry appeared nervous. "I, I wasn't saying it should. That's simply why we followed him. Anyway we..."

Harry continued his story all the way up to and including the small fight Draco and Neville had. Neville and Hermione were next and explained what they saw. Percy was then brought to the stand.

"Is it true that Draco Malfoy gave you an enchanted diary?"

"Yes sir."

After he'd explained how he'd been given it, he was asked why he wrote in it and never told a teacher about it.

While obviously trying to hold back tears, he answered, "Because I was stupid. I thought I was smarter than everyone, and I thought the diary could help me. Instead of helping me, it began making me do things without knowing it. I started having gaps in my memory. I'd find myself someplace and not know how I got there..."

He described everything he went through as he began crying. Arthur had to physically restrain Molly from going up to him before he was done with his testimony. After he was done, Dumbledore was called to the stand and simply testified that Narcissa met with him and said she was interested in a teaching position. Narcissa's testimony matched Dumbledore's. What really sealed her fate was the testimony of her own son, who'd been in the wizarding equivalent of juvenile hall since his mum was arrested. He arrogantly strutted into the courtroom.

"Mr. Malfoy, do you know why you're here?"

"Some blood-traitor said she did something bad. We've got to clear up the matter so we can go home."

"I see. Do you remember the day you and she visited Hogwarts?"

He smiled. "Of course I do."

"Did you give something to Percy Weasley that day?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"My mum said to give it to that blood traitor Weasley and it would make some filthy mudbloods die."

"Are you disappointed that no one died because of it?"

“Of course. Mum said that something must be going wrong since the monster from Slytherin’s chamber hasn’t killed anyone yet. It was supposed to purge the school of mudbloods, not just petrify them.”

Narcissa, who was seated in the courtroom, was now glaring at her oblivious son.

-

After that testimony, it was no surprise that she was found guilty and was allowed to live much closer to her husband. The question was what to do with Draco, who looked incredibly distraught as he watched her led away.

“It is the judgment of this court that if you were older, you would be charged and sentenced to Azkaban. However, this court feels that you are too young to be sent there and that the reason you did what you did is because your mind has been poisoned by the lies your criminal parents have fed you.”

“My parents aren’t criminals! They didn’t lie!”

“It is the hope of this court that the damage they have done can be reversed. We have therefore decided to honor the request filed by your closest relative who is not in Azkaban. Would Mr. Sirius Black stand up?”

To the surprise of the entire Potter clan, their friend stood up from one of the seats in the back row and faced the judge.

“This man is your mother’s cousin, and is being appointed your guardian, and you will be living with him. Every month for the first year you will be visited by a Ministry representative to see how you are doing. After the first year, that caseworker will decide if you still need those visits or not.” What the judge didn’t mention is the recommendation they’d previously made to Sirius that he begin taking the boy to a mind healer.

“What?” exclaimed Draco. “You can’t make me! My mum said he disgraced the family...”

“By being the only member who didn’t become a criminal and end up in Azkaban!” said the judge harshly. “You must begin realizing that your parents were wrong about a great many things, and that if it weren’t for the generosity of Mr. Black, you would become a ward of the Ministry. Is that what you’d prefer?”

Draco now looked terrified. He obviously knew what that would mean. “No. I, I’ll live with Mr. Black. At least he’s a pureblood.”

“Then it’s settled. He has some paperwork to fill out, and then you’ll leave with him. Case dismissed.”

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 27 – Draco's New Home

Sirius Black spent about two hours at the Ministry filling out forms regarding his guardianship of Draco Malfoy. One of the forms was regarding his relation to the boy, and he attached a statement from Andromeda Tonks, who was just as closely related to Draco as Sirius, that renounced any legal claim to Draco. While she indicated she was sympathetic to the boy's situation, she didn't think it would work out.

He also found out that Draco had a trust vault to cover his schooling and would inherit the family fortune when he became an adult. He found out that if he wanted to, they could live in Malfoy Manor, but Padfoot had even less desire to live there than Black Manor. One thing he noticed was that one of the house elves had been given the task of watching over Draco. From what he read, the elf came with the boy and had experience babysitting him. Sirius certainly didn't trust his house elf with that task.

Another question was where they'd be living. Padfoot had come to the reluctant conclusion that his one-bedroom flat wouldn't properly accommodate them, so he'd inspected his ancestral home when he began considering taking Draco in. Surprisingly, Kreacher had actually kept the place clean. He'd even repainted and carpeted the house. Apparently the threat of clothes (chapter 17) had inspired the lazy elf. Sirius suspected that it also helped that Kreacher couldn't spend all day talking to his mother's portrait anymore. He'd decided to not sack his crazy elf yet.

When he finally was finished, he turned in the forms and was given custody of the youngest Malfoy, as well as a trunk full of his possessions.

"Don't think I'll listen to you just because you're my guardian!" spat the brat as soon as they were alone.

"We'll see about that!" Sirius shot back angrily before bringing his temper under control a moment later.

The mind healer that Sirius had spoken to about Draco had stressed that although he obviously needed to show Draco that he cared about him, he had to be firm with the boy from the beginning. Letting him

get away with disobeying the rules wouldn't help him in any way, shape, or form. They had an appointment with the mind healer the next day for a much more thorough evaluation, but Sirius planned to follow the general advice for now. He had no experience dealing with troubled kids and needed all the help he could get.

"Come with me. We're going to your new home. Walk in front of me so I can see you." The two walked toward the floo exit, but before they got there, someone called out Sirius' name.

"Why didn't you tell anybody?" asked James as his family approached. Neville and Harry stayed a bit back with Alice while Prongs walked straight up to the unlikely pair. The boys were glaring at Draco, who was leering at them.

"I didn't want you to try talking me out of it." Sirius took a deep breath. "I believe you all know each other."

"Yeah, I know who they are," said Draco, acting as though he smelled something awful.

"I think we'd better get going," said Sirius.

"Wait until I tell Moony about this," said James. "Hagrid too. He's been a bit depressed since he got out of Azkaban and we were gonna see him later."

"Tell him I said hi." Padfoot looked at his ward. "Floo to Black Manor."

-

Draco landed on his feet after traveling through the floo and looked around. He smiled smugly as he recognized that he was in a noble mansion. Even if it wasn't as good as Malfoy Manor, it was an acceptable home. There was a crack and a house elf appeared bowing in front of him.

"Kreacher wonders who is this that enters the Noble and Most Ancient House of Black."

Draco proudly proclaimed, "I'm Draco Malfoy, servant! How DARE you speak to me!" and kicked the surprised elf in the face. As he fell backwards, the fireplace lit up again, depositing Sirius Black in his ancestral home. He immediately noticed the situation as the elf got back up.

"What's Draco been doing, Kreacher?"

"Master Malfoy moves with a nobility that befits his pure blood," croaked Kreacher at once. He had a look of love on his bruised face. "His features recall the fine bones of my mistress and his manners are those of—"

"I asked what he's done not how he walks!"

"He properly punished Kreacher, who didn't know that such a noble..."

"Shut up!" He then turned toward his charge. "You are not to punish house elves!"

"Why should you have all the fun? Mother allowed me to..."

"I meant WE don't punish elves, not that I wanted to keep that privilege for myself!" Sirius growled in frustration. He turned back to Kreacher. "Tell me whenever Draco punishes you!"

"Yes master," said the elf, bowing low. "Does this mean that the noble Master Malfoy will be living here with Kreacher?" he muttered with a slight smile. "Kreacher is honored to serve such a..."

"Get out, Kreacher!" The elf disappeared with a crack. Padfoot turned back to Malfoy. "According to a parchment I read, you had a house elf assigned to watch you."

"I had my own personal servant," he said proudly.

"What's its name?"

"Loddy."

There was another crack and a female elf in a filthy old tea cozy appeared in front of them. "Master Draco Malfoy is calling Loddy. Loddy is coming."

"Loddy, my name is Sirius Black, and I'm now Draco's guardian and this is my house. I want you to watch over Draco when he's here alone and make sure he doesn't get into trouble or leave the house. I'll give you more specific instructions about that later. For now can you make us dinner?" He turned back to Draco. "I don't trust anything Kreacher makes, although it seems he likes you, Draco, so maybe he wouldn't poison you."

Sirius was thankful for the clause in Loddy's duties that said she could disobey Draco while he was underage if his order was against the rules of the house he was living in. In other words, she could stop Draco from disobeying Sirius and therefore was a good babysitter.

While they ate dinner together, Draco only spoke when spoken to and was barely civil. Kreacher showed up to seemingly bask in Draco's glory, muttering praises of the boy's intelligence, parentage, and manners enough to drive Sirius mad. When dinner was over, he showed Draco to his new room and told him to be ready to go to Diagon Alley with him early the next morning.

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 28 – Mind and Soul

Sirius sat nervously in the lobby of Mind Healer Jones' clinic. While mind healers definitely used muggle psychology, there was another aspect to their field – checking the mind for any types of enchantments or magical invasions, and then freeing patients from those and dealing with whatever damage has been done.

Padfoot shuddered when he thought about all the different things wizards could do to each others' minds. The Imperius Curse, love potions, using Legilimency to plant suggestions, full-out Legilimency assaults wherein any natural Occlumency shields the victim may have are shattered. At the bare minimum, the victim has severe headaches and has to re-experience her/his worst memories. At most, the victim suffers severe brain damage. Sirius Black was sure there were many other types of mental assaults he wasn't familiar with.

Draco had been in Healer Jones' office for nearly an hour now. His new guardian was aware that the first part of treatment was a thorough examination to see if the Malfoys had used any of these methods on Draco. He wouldn't put it past them to do it. He knew that his own father had tried planting subtle Legilimency suggestions in his mind to make him hate muggleborns and believe all that crap about pureblood superiority. Fortunately, Sirius had been a natural Occlumens, and clever enough not to let the family know it. He had felt the soft touch of Legilimency but pretended not to. He played his role as a stupid bigot until he stepped onto the Hogwarts Express for the first time. That's when his pretence ended and his real life began.

After that, when he did come home, he avoided his family as much as possible. He hated to see what they were doing to his brother Regulus, turning him into another believer in pureblood supremacy, but there was absolutely nothing he could do about it. Leaving Reggie behind was his only regret about running away.

He never spoke about that mental conditioning with anyone, not even the Marauders, but he knew it was a tradition in all the so-called noble families. That was also the way family members were persuaded to find each other attractive enough to marry and...Sirius shuddered again at the thought that his family had wanted him to

marry his five-years-older cousin Andromeda, just because she was his favorite cousin. He'd sensed his father trying to put thoughts of how attractive she was in his mind. That was just before he ran away, five years before both his father and brother died. Andromeda's parents, fortunately, didn't do the mental conditioning to their daughter, and consequently she'd married a muggle and had a daughter with a rare gift.

Although deep down, Sirius knew that it wouldn't be easy to undo all that conditioning, he secretly hoped that the healer could perform one spell or ritual and suddenly Draco would be a well-adjusted boy like Harry or Neville. Usually by the time a kid turns eleven, he's had so much conditioning done that seven years of listening to Albus Dumbledore and seeing muggleborns outperform them at every turn can't shake their belief in their own superiority. It doesn't matter how kind a muggleborn is to them either. They're just mudbloods, and the highest status they can attain is tolerated pet, provided they are obedient and useful to their masters.

He was interrupted from his thoughts by the nearby door opening. Healer Jones stuck his head out. "Mr. Black, would you please come in here?"

"Of course, Healer." Sirius followed the Healer into a small room where he closed the door and cast a privacy charm. "How bad is Draco?"

The Healer took a deep breath. "There is evidence that he's been exposed to subtle Legilimency hundreds of times. He's also been exposed to both the Imperius and Cruciatus curses."

Sirius' eyes widened. "Cr-cruciatus?" Even he couldn't believe Draco's parents had gone this far. "Did Lucius do that before he was arrested?" He didn't want to think his cousin was capable of that.

"There is evidence that he's been exposed to that curse a few times every year since he was two, but it hasn't stopped. It's possible his father used to perform it on him, but it is clear that his mother has been doing it since then."

Sirius sat down. "Was it her idea of punishment? Did he say that it was done when he was bad?"

"He did not admit to any of it. In fact, all he'll say is how great his parents are and how superior he is to everyone because of that. He's right now talking to one of my assistants who asked him to explain why he's superior to her. We hope that if he has to apply logic to his prejudice that it will help him slowly see the light. In any case, the nerve damage we detected can only be caused by repeated exposure to that curse. This boy has been conditioned to be a perfect puppet for You-Know-Who or another dark lord with the same message."

"Is he too far gone? Can you help him? Is there anything I can do?"

"We don't believe that anyone is beyond helping while they're still alive. We've removed the Imperius curse from him, but most of the conditioning can't be simply removed like that. It will take years to unlearn all that garbage."

"Can't you just oblivate the suggestions out of his mind?"

The Healer shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid not. Not without removing all of the boys' memories, thus destroying who he is. That would violate our oaths not to do any harm, and is also an illegal use of that spell." He smiled. "Besides, I don't think you want to potty train him, do you? We'll have to slowly deprogram him."

-

A few weeks later, Harry, Neville, and James were driving Alice crazy with how much they were trying to help her do everything simply because she was pregnant. She had just finished yelling at James for suggesting she stop teaching for the rest of the year. While straining her voice, she explained that the term would be over in plenty of time for the birth. She was due toward the end of July. They joked that this baby would be born on the twenty-ninth, so the kids would have three birthdays in a row (Neville's is the thirtieth and Harry's is the thirty-first). Her husband retreated to their bedroom, saying something about grading papers.

She heard a pecking sound, and looked up to see Sirius' owl tapping its beak against the window in their quarters. Sighing, she started to get up.

"Stay right there, mum. I've got it," said Harry as he rushed to the window.

"I'm not helpless, you know."

"Of course not, mum, but I was already up." Harry took the letter from the owl and gave it a treat. The bird flew off and Harry closed the window. "Here you go."

She unrolled the scroll of parchment that Harry handed her.

'Dear Potters,

Things are going a bit rough here at home, but I'm managing. I'm following Healer Jones' advice. I couldn't believe it when I found out that Cissy used the cruciatus curse on her own son as punishment, but I guess once you start down that path, there's nothing so bad you wouldn't do it. I finally did get Draco to admit they did it, but he thinks they were right to. He still hasn't been able to explain why he's superior to anybody, so I hope he's starting to see that he's not.

Hindering my progress is that crazy elf Kreacher, who seems convinced that Draco's a god. I'd give it clothes except that I'm afraid Draco will believe that the only reason I got rid of it was because it liked him.

I've gotten him to talk a little about how it felt when his parents were taken away from him, and explained that his father took Neville's father away from him. I also explained how he's got a new father and brother now, with another brother or sister on the way, so life can go on after you lose your family. Anyway, I'd like your family to come to dinner in a few weeks after me and Healer Jones have had a few more chances to talk to Draco.

Can't help but love,

Sirius

P.S. Tell everyone in the family I said hi!

Alice giggled at how Sirius always signed his letters, implying that everybody loved him. She knew they'd be happy to come to dinner (she wasn't really sure about Neville, but she'd talk to him), so she arranged a Friday night, knowing they didn't have anything planned. She tried to sneak out to the Owlry, but was caught by Neville before leaving their quarters. She reluctantly let her son mail the letter, wondering when she'd talk with him about the dinner.

While Neville was still gone, someone knocked on their door. Alice opened it to see the headmaster. "Professor Dumbledore, it's good to see you. Come on in."

"Thank you, Alice, and might I remind you to refer to me as Albus when students aren't around? Is James around?" He looked around for a moment and lowered his voice. "I've just realized a possible location of a Horcrux that I can't believe I haven't thought of until now. I'd like for us to investigate the location this Saturday."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 29 – Wounded

It was dark on this starless night on this street of downtown London. Although there were a few empty lots there, most of the neighborhood consisted of structures that seemed more than ready to be condemned. There were streetlamps that no longer appeared to function, and graffiti that looked twenty years old on most of the buildings. The street was empty except for several rats being chased by a filthy stray cat whose original color was impossible to tell.

It was in front of one of these buildings, a rather grim, square structure surrounded by high railings, that a loud 'pop' was heard, and three people holding hands appeared out of nowhere. The one on the left was a tall man with dark, unruly hair and glasses. He was wearing blue jeans and a t-shirt that advertised a sports team. The one on the right was a woman with long brown hair wearing a pair of tan slacks and a button-up yellow shirt who appeared to be about four or five months pregnant. The man in the middle was tall, with extremely long white hair and a matching beard that went down to his waist. He was wearing a velvet purple suit with a white shirt and pink tie. He was wearing a purple beret and white jogging shoes to complete his look. He wiped his forehead in relief.

"Whew. It's been a long time since I side-along apparated two people at once."

"You could've just left one of us here and gotten the other," suggested Alice.

With a twinkle in his eyes, Albus said with a grin, "I doubt that either of you would want me to leave the other alone in this neighborhood." He looked around and said, "We're in luck. There are no muggles around that we'd have to obliviate. This is the place." He opened the iron gate with a loud creak and walked up to the building itself. He took out his wand and performed a silent spell. The door of the edifice glowed green for a moment. A smile crossed the headmaster's lips. "I was correct. Tom, at least we can safely assume it was Tom, has placed a few wards on his old orphanage. One is to keep it standing, and the other is to discourage muggles from going near it – either to break in or demolish it."

“There’s only one reason he’d do that,” said James as he pulled out his wand.

“Precisely, which is why we must proceed cautiously.” He performed a simple Alohomora spell, and the door unlocked, which made them all grip their wands tighter.

Alice followed Dumbledore with James right behind her as they entered the abandoned building. It was full of dust and cobwebs, with bugs crawling and flying everywhere. James couldn’t tell what color the floor had been or whether it had been tiled or carpeted. Within moments, all three of them had performed a bubblehead charm so they wouldn’t destroy their lungs breathing the filthy air.

“I believe that Tom would’ve hidden a Horcrux in his room – the place in which he learned he was a wizard. This way.”

With his wand out, the aged headmaster led them straight to the first door in a long corridor and opened it. The room looked no different than the others. It was just as full of dust as every other room in the decrepit place. It had an old bed and wardrobe in it, just like every other bedroom. Yet, all three occupants could feel something ominous in the air.

“Is that the wardrobe?” asked James. Dumbledore had told them the story of how he’d delivered Riddle’s Hogwarts letter and Tom had had stolen items in it. Albus silently nodded. They each knew better than to just walk up and open the wardrobe, so they simply stared at it for a few moments while Dumbledore waved his wand.

“The wards are tied to the wardrobe, which leads me to believe that the building will collapse the moment it’s opened.”

“Typical,” commented Alice.

“Indeed,” agreed James. “So what else will we have to face when we get past that?”

The headmaster performed more spells, and then sadly admitted, “I can’t tell what spells are inside the wardrobe.”

“Alright,” said Alice. “Let’s put up our own wards to hold the building up and open the bloody thing.”

Five minutes later, without touching the wardrobe, Alice pried the door open with a nearby piece of wood while standing to the side. “Ahhh!” shouted Alice painfully. A wide beam of light had shot from the center of the wardrobe. If she had opened it normally, it would’ve sliced through her stomach and killed her and the baby. As it was, it grazed her left arm, which immediately began gushing blood as she grabbed the wound with her right.

“Alice!” shouted James as Dumbledore pointed his wand at Mrs. Potter.

“I’m afraid you’ll have to remove your hand from the wound before I can heal it, Alice,” stated the aged wizard.

Slowly, she did that and Albus began muttering in Latin. After about a minute, he said, “You’ll have to go to St. Mungo’s. The wound isn’t closing.”

“I’ll take her there,” declared James. “We can finish this later.” He grabbed his wife’s good arm, and they both disappeared away, leaving Dumbledore alone.

-

Harry and Neville were with the four youngest Weasleys, swimming in the pond near the Burrow. It was Saturday morning. Harry and Neville had spent the night with the Weasleys. Fred and George had just pulled Neville under the water as a joke when Molly Weasley came running toward them with a panicked expression. The twins let go of Neville.

“Harry, Neville, your mum’s at St. Mungo’s.”

“WHAT?!” they said together.

“Is something wrong with the baby?” asked Harry as he and his brother made their way to the shore.

"No, dears, at least I don't think so. She got hit in the left arm with some kind of dark curse. Your father just flooded me. She's was admitted in the hospital some time last night. That's all I know."

"We've got to go see her," said a breathless Neville as he got out of the water just before Harry.

"Yes. Your dad asked me to take you there."

"Who attacked her?" asked Harry, "and when?"

"I don't know," said Molly. She then looked at the others, who were also making their way to the shore. "We're all going there once you dry off."

-

Alice was lying in a bed at St. Mungo's, with her husband sitting on a chair nearby. Her left arm had a large bandage on it. She had just woken up when the door opened and closed, revealing Albus Dumbledore.

"Hello, Albus," she said, waking up James and startling the headmaster.

"I apologize for waking you, Alice. I had planned on speaking only to James. However, since you're both up, I can inform you both of our success." He then put a privacy spell on the door.

"Success?" asked James groggily until his eyes widened. "You mean you got it?"

With a grin on his face, he answered, "I obtained and destroyed Hufflepuff's cup."

"That's great," said Alice, "Now we don't have to go back there."

He then removed the privacy spell. "Now for the most important matter. How are you, Alice."

"I lost a lot of blood, but they've given me a blood replenishing potion. They managed to stop the bleeding, but they want to keep me here until tomorrow morning." Her head went down. "I'm going to have a scar near my shoulder."

"The baby wasn't affected, then?"

"No," said James happily. "They said that the baby is perfectly fine."

At that moment, the door opened again, revealing several redheads along with Neville and Harry. "Mum!" they both shouted as they ran up to her.

"I'm alright, boys, but make sure not to touch my arm where it's bandaged," she said when Harry accidentally touched the spot where she was cut (which was still a bit sore) while hugging her.

"Thanks for watching the boys, Molly," said James.

"It's my pleasure," she answered. "Hello, Professor Dumbledore."

"Hello, Molly. As good as it is to see you all, duty calls. I have some matters to deal with at Hogwarts. Good day to you all."

-

They stayed at the hospital for about an hour, and then the Weasleys left the Potter family alone. They told the kids that she'd been hurt while they were getting another Horcrux like the diary, and that now there were only two left.

"Promise you won't go after another one until after you have the baby," asked Neville.

"I promise, honey," Alice said. "We already talked about it. Your dad hadn't wanted me to go this time, but I was insistent." She sighed. "I guess he was right. The baby could've been killed. So, no more fighting Voldemort while pregnant for me."

"Good," said Neville.

"There's something I wanted to talk to you boys about, especially you, Neville. "We're going to have dinner with Sirius and Draco next week."

"WHAT?" yelled Neville while Harry was quiet. "No! I don't want to see that kid, or eat with him! His dad..."

"I know what his dad did, and what he did, Neville. He was raised to hate everyone who disagrees with his father's philosophy. Your uncle Sirius is trying to help Draco change and become a better person. You want that, don't you?"

"Sure, he should get better, but that doesn't mean I want to hang out with him."

She sighed. She didn't feel that she should tell the boys about the torture Draco went through, because that would get them to pretend to like Draco when they really don't. He needed real friends, not forced ones. "Alright. I won't make either of you go if you don't want to. That wouldn't help anybody. I do want you to think about it. I'm just asking you to give Draco a second chance."

"I'll go," said Harry.

"Thank you," she said as she grinned at the boy who had become her second son.

"I'll think about it," Neville said grudgingly.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 30 – Lily Potter

“Welcome to the house of Black,” said Kreacher loudly as he greeted the Potter family, who had just stepped out of the fireplace. More quietly (but not quietly enough), he mumbled, “Three blood-traitors and a half-blood befouling this beautiful house. What would my mistress say?”

“Go away, you filthy rodent,” yelled Sirius as he walked into the room, followed by Draco, who had a neutral expression on his face. “Hi, James, Alice, Harry, and Neville!” It’s good to see you.” The day before, Neville had reluctantly agreed to go with them after Harry had said he was acting like Draco by not going. The Longbottom heir was very tense as he was led into the living room. His mother, who seemed to be getting bigger by the day, sat down on a comfortable easy chair. She’d been released from St. Mungo’s the week before with a clean bill of health for both her and the baby living inside her. You could cut the tension in the room with a severing charm as Neville and Draco stared at each other from two different couches. They weren’t exactly glaring, but it was obvious neither liked the other.

“Hello, Draco,” said Alice in her most friendly voice.

“Hello, Mrs. Potter,” the Malfoy boy replied evenly.

“Do you like your new home?” asked James.

“It’s fine,” said Draco with an unreadable expression.

“Do you like your room?” said James.

“Yes.”

“Are you and Sirius getting along okay?” asked Alice.

“Fine.”

It was obvious that Draco was attempting to behave, but was not at all happy. He would speak only when spoken to and answer questions with as few words as necessary. Harry, who was sitting between his brother and father, knew he wouldn’t like being asked

question after question like that. He looked around for something to say to end this inquisition his parents were putting Draco through. His eyes rested on an unusual object set on the mantle over the fireplace. It appeared to be a stone basin that reminded him of one of his favorite toys that Dumbledore had, but it was smaller. Next to it was a rack of corked test tubes filled with a silvery substance that seemed to be something between liquid and air. He recognized them as thoughts.

“Is that a Pensieve, Uncle Padfoot?” he asked, pointing.

Sirius grinned when he saw what Harry was asking about. He got up and walked toward it. “Yes. It’s not quite the same size as Professor Dumbledore’s, but it is indeed a Pensieve. It’s been in my family for generations, and I recently took it out of our vault when I bought some memories.” He indicated the rack of test tubes. “I’ve got five Quidditch championship games, three muggle rock concerts, and two muggle movies.” He picked up the Pensieve and put it on an end table. “What do you want to watch, Harry?”

“A Quidditch game!” he said excitedly. For a moment, he could have sworn Draco was smiling at him as they gathered around the basin, but then the smile was gone as Malfoy reached out like the others. Harry felt himself fall until he landed in the stands at a World Cup from a few years ago.

Watching an hour-long Quidditch game seemed to ease the tension a bit as they all immersed themselves into the memory, sitting in empty chairs toward the top of the stadium. They could’ve actually shared a seat with memory-people, but that would’ve felt weird. Draco and Neville sat on opposite sides of the box they were in and cheered for opposing teams.

Right after they left the Pensieve, another House Elf appeared in front of them.

“Loddy is being sorry to interrupt, but Loddy is finished making dinner.”

“Thank you, Loddy,” said Sirius. “We’ll be right there.” The elf popped out of the room.

-

Dinner was an unusual affair for Harry. When they ignored Draco, it seemed like a normal meal with Sirius, but whenever someone tried to bring Draco into the conversation, everyone would tense up again. Harry might not have understood everything grownups did, but he did understand that Malfoy didn't want to talk about his former or current home. Harry knew what the blond boy would want to talk about. "How did you like that game?"

"It was good," said Draco, showing a bit of enthusiasm. "That Ludo Bagman was a great Beater. Did you see the way he..."

The conversation was lively for about five minutes until James asked, "Did your parents ever take you to a game?"

"No, sir," was about all that they got out of Malfoy after that. They finished the meal in relative silence and soon were about to floo back to Hogwarts.

"Take care of yourself," said Harry, the last one to leave, as he held out his hand toward Draco. "Maybe we can watch another game together some time."

"I'd like that," said Draco, showing a small smile while shaking Harry's hand.

"Bye, Uncle Sirius."

"Bye, Harry."

He tossed a pinch of floo powder into the fireplace, and clearly said, "Hogwarts – Defense Against the Dark Arts Office," and disappeared into the green flames.

-

He landed on his feet and walked out of the fireplace in his dad's office only to be engulfed in a big hug. Judging by the hair that was chocking him, his attacker was his stepmother.

"I was so proud of you, Harry!" she declared. "You seemed to be the only one capable of getting a reaction out of Draco."

"Er, thanks," he said when she let go of him, "but it was easy. He didn't want to talk about his life. I don't think any kid does. What he wanted to talk about was..."

"Quidditch," said James with a grin.

Alice scowled at him. "Then why didn't he like your question, James."

He looked down. "Er, I brought up his parents."

"Oh." She turned back to Harry. "I hope you and he become friends." She turned to Neville, who seemed to be sulking. "Neville, you were very well behaved tonight. I know you didn't want to go, but you did anyway, and I'm proud of you."

"Thanks, mum."

-

The rest of the school year passed peacefully. When they got the chance, Dumbledore let the two Professor Potters watch the memory of what happened in the orphanage after James and Alice left. It mainly consisted of Albus flicking his wand back and forth as he overcame each defense and eventually picked up Hufflepuff's cup, apparating out of there immediately. He then used the same spell Alice had used to burn the diary on the cup, quenching the magical fire before it was out of control.

Alice was able to teach her classes, and was relieved when she finished grading the final exams in the second week of June. She was also glad she didn't have to administer the O.W.L. and N.E.W.T. exams. Even she admitted she'd have never made it another week.

James continued teaching Harry, Neville, and Hermione much as he had the summer before – five days per week, four hours per day. By this time, he wasn't sure that they'd learn anything new in their first year of Hogwarts, especially in Defense. They decided to forego any trips this summer, figuring that Alice wouldn't enjoy a trip while eight

months pregnant, nor would it be very wise to take a newborn on holiday. They'd wait until Christmastime.

-

On Friday, July 29th, the Potter family was visiting the Burrow. The boys were going to spend the next day at Hermione's house playing muggle games, and finally, the boys' birthday party was going to be at Hogwarts on the 31st. Alice had still not given birth, and she was getting irritable. She was inside the house with Molly. James and Arthur were in the shed looking at Mr. Weasley's latest muggle device he'd gotten his hands on – an electric vacuum cleaner with a plug! The kids (Harry, Neville, Bill, Charlie, Percy, Fred, George, Ron, and Ginny) were in the pond. Bill, who was seventeen, was in charge. They were playing a game of water-volleyball with Bill and the four youngest against the rest.

About half-way through a game, three owls came swooping out of the sky toward the kids.

"Time out," called Bill quickly, as he made his way to the shore. "Those look like Hogwarts letters. They usually come the first week of August. I guess they got them ready early. Come on, Charlie, Percy."

It turned out that Bill was right, as each of the students opened their letters. Charlie was surprised to find two badges inside his envelope. After staring at them for about thirty seconds, he exclaimed, "I'm Quidditch Captain!"

"That's great!" said Harry and several others.

"What's the other badge?" asked Fred.

"Oh, that." He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm a prefect, too."

"That's fantastic!" said Percy enthusiastically while putting his second-year booklist back in the envelope. "That's the one you should be happy about. What's that you've got, Bill? Your new prefect badge?"

Everyone looked at the oldest Weasley brother, who also had a badge in his hand. "No. Er, I'm Head Boy."

"Wow!" said Percy, clearly in awe. "We've got to show mum!"

-

"Once, Lily actually used one of these things," said James, referring to the vacuum. "It was right after we'd gotten married. She insisted that our house had electricity. I was in the study reading, when suddenly this loud noise..."

"James! Arthur!" shouted Molly as she pushed the shed door open, "Come inside the house, quick! It's Alice!"

James ran out the door, followed quickly by his friend. When he got into the house, he found his wife pacing in the kitchen holding her stomach. James walked over to her.

"What's wrong, love?" he asked, concerned.

"My water's broke," she replied.

-

Alice soon found herself on Molly and Arthur's bed screaming abuses at James as the Matron and a Healer from St. Mungo's arrived. Arthur was sent to tell the kids. Molly was rubbing Alice's head with a damp cloth.

"How are you, Mrs. Potter? Are you alright?" the Matron asked.

"DO I LOOK ALRIGHT TO YOU?" Alice shouted.

"I hope you don't plan to kiss your baby and your husband with that mouth," the Matron said with a smirk.

"Relax dear," James said, holding her hand.

"JAMES POTTER - IF YOU TELL ME TO RELAX ONCE MORE I WILL RIP YOUR HEAD OFF AND LET HOGWARTS STUDENTS USE IT FOR BLUDGER TARGET PRACTICE!" she shouted.

The Matron had a look down below.

"Alright, you are three centimeters dilated. Contractions are twenty seconds apart. Looks like this is going to be a quick labor," she said.

-

Harry and Neville were in the kitchen sitting down having a bit of cake. Arthur had met them while they were on the way back from the pond. Bill and Charlie were sitting with them. The four youngest Weasleys were still changing out of their wet clothes. The two young boys were looking very worried.

"Don't worry boys; your mum is going to be fine," Bill said.

"Mum had seven of us, and she's still here," Charlie said in a reassuring tone.

-

Alice screamed again as she had another contraction.

"I think I'm ready to push," she declared.

"Let me have a look first," the Matron said. She had a quick look, and stuck her head up. "You are almost completely dilated. A few more minutes." Alice groaned. James came over to her.

"Don't worry, Alice. Remember, you've done this once before," he said.

"AND I AM NEVER DOING IT AGAIN!" she yelled. The Healer started chanting some words.

"That's a Brazilian prayer for the dead!" Arthur, who'd returned once he got the kids, said. Alice punched the Healer in the face after calling him an idiot. He started chanting again.

"Japanese puberty rite," Molly said. The Healer got punched again. "What are you doing?"

“Just saying a prayer for your baby,” the Healer replied, moving out of the way before Alice could hit him a third time. She screamed in pain as another contraction came.

“Relax, love,” James said but straight away he knew he said the wrong thing because this time, Alice punched him in the face and he fell to the ground. He had to do a quick, “*Repaïro*,” to his glasses before he got up.

“Okay, Alice. You’re fully dilated. When you feel a contraction, push,” the Matron instructed.

Alice pulled her legs back and bent them. James grabbed them from behind to keep them bent. The Matron went beneath Alice to help guide the baby out. James counted to ten before Alice took a deep breath. Molly wiped her brow with the cloth again.

She felt another contraction and started to push. Molly went behind the Matron.

“Her head is crowning!” Molly said, “Brown hair, but it looks a mess.” James counted Alice through the contraction. He gave her a quick kiss on the head just as the next contraction came. She started to push again.

“Good work, Alice. She’s almost out. Push down,” the Matron said as Alice kept pushing. “Here she is!” The baby came out and the Matron picked her up. She rubbed her and within seconds the room was filled with the sound of gentle cries. The Matron used a cleaning charm on the baby, and then wrapped her up in a blanket before placing her on Alice’s stomach. Everyone looked at the tiny baby, and felt nothing but love for her.

She had Alice’s looks, including her brown hair. James held his wife’s hand as they held their daughter. Suddenly, the messy brown hair changed color as they watched in surprise. It was now the exact shade of auburn that someone else used to have.

“That looks like Lily’s hair,” whispered James.

A few minutes later, James and Arthur came into the kitchen and everyone stood up.

"Is everything alright?" Bill asked.

"Everything went well," Arthur said. "In fact, the baby has a very rare gift."

"What's that?" asked Harry.

James walked up to his sons. "Your sister's a Metamorphmagus."

"Wow," said Neville, in awe.

"Like Tonks?" commented Charlie.

"Would you like to see the baby?" the proud father asked them. They both nodded and James led the way up.

-

In the bedroom, Harry and Neville looked at the baby with interest. She was looking around in her mother's arms. Her messy hair was still auburn. Harry stared at it in awe until it turned electric blue.

"What's her name?" the Matron asked, preparing the birth certificate.

"Lillian Molly Potter," James stated. The Matron filled out the certificate, duplicated it and passed it over. Harry smiled at the baby's name as his eyes met his father's. He nodded approvingly.

Name: Lillian Molly Potter

Date of Birth: July 29 1988

Place of Birth: The Burrow, Ottery, St. Catchpole

Time of Birth: 5:32 PM

Weight: 6.5 lbs

Height: 17 in

“Molly, Arthur. James and I discussed this a while ago but never had the courage to ask you. Would you be Lily’s godparents?” Alice asked.

“We would be honored,” Molly said happily.

A few minutes later, Arthur allowed his children in – two at a time, to meet the newest addition to the Potter family as the Healer and Matron left. They all seemed to like the baby, but no one got as excited about her as little Ginny. “She looks just like a little doll!”

-

The next day, Hermione was disappointed that she didn’t get to see the new baby when her parents picked up the boys at the Leaky Cauldron. Alice and Lily had stayed behind while James delivered them to the Grangers. After wishing Neville a happy birthday, she started asking a lot of questions about Lily’s morphing ability. She was very fascinated by the baby’s unique talent.

“That’s so sweet that they named her after your mum,” Hermione told Harry.

He smiled. “Mum, that is my step-mum, insisted after the first color Lily’s hair changed into red like my real mum had. She was close friends with her before she died.” Harry looked sad for a moment, and then smiled at his friend. “What new videogames do you have?”

-

The boys enjoyed their day with the Grangers, as well as their eighth birthday party at Hogwarts. While Hermione and almost everyone else, including Sirius and Remus, was ogling the baby, Harry talked Quidditch with Draco, telling him the story of how he’d been caught on Charlie’s broom during their first year living at the school.

“I’ll bet you can’t wait to get back on a broom again,” said Malfoy.

“Yeah. At least I get to watch Quidditch a lot with my dad. I even get to see some Gryffindor practices.”

“Cool!”

“Yeah, it’s great.”

“Harry!”

He turned to see that Neville was calling him. “What?”

“It’s time to open the presents.”

“Okay.”

-

Sirius gave both Harry and Neville a set of ten Pensieve memories suited to them (Harry got seven Quidditch matches and three concerts while Neville got five movies, two concerts and three magical plant documentaries. They each had a note that said Sirius would talk their dad into getting the Potter family Pensieve out of their vault.

-

True to Sirius’ word, the next day James, Alice, Neville, Harry, and Lily went to Gringotts. Alice stayed in the lobby with the baby setting up a new trust vault for Lily while her ‘three boys’ rode a cart to the Potter storage vault.

“Each of you,” said James as they rode toward their destination, “has a trust vault that you’ll be able to access once you turn eleven.” He didn’t feel the need to point out what Neville already knew – his trust account had been set up by his biological father.

When they arrived, the goblin opened the vault and they walked in. Harry was amazed at the many things that were in there. Boxes of jewelry, suits of armor, a collection of weapons such as swords and spears, and a large basin that appeared to be pure silver with runes carved on it.

“I see you’ve found the Pensieve,” said James to his son. “Good. Some other time, we’ll look through all this junk, but your mum’s waiting with your sister.” He grabbed the basin and put it in a bag that the goblin provided, and exited the vault. “I’m glad this bag is

charmed to be weightless. That Pensieve would get heavy if I had to carry it very far.”

-

When they returned to the nearly empty lobby, they found that the appropriate amount of gold had been transferred from the main Potter vault to Lily Potter’s trust vault, and Alice had the key. Just before they got to the exit, ten people in black robes and white masks ran into the bank, pointing their wands.

“Left-over Death Eaters,” muttered James as he pulled out his wand. Harry noticed his stepmum doing the same as he felt a sense of panic run through him. There were people dressed like that when Voldemort killed his mum.

“Give us all your gold!” one of the Death Eaters shouted while another shot a green beam of light that was very familiar to Harry at a nearby man, who immediately fell over. The only other people there were an old couple who appeared terrified. Another masked killer was doing something to the entrance. One killed the goblin guard. Yet another conjured a wall between the customers and the other goblins.

“What do we have here?” said a female voice from behind the skull-like mask. “A nice little family?”

“Not just any family,” said a man next to her, “Look at that kid’s forehead. It’s...”

“Harry Potter!” the woman concluded as she pointed her wand at him. “Somehow you killed our master. Crucio!”

Instantly, the training his father had been giving him took over. He wasn’t gonna let these monsters hurt anyone else. He dodged to the left, crouching down long enough to pull his mother’s wand out of his pocket. At the same time, James shot a reducto at the woman, blasting her right arm off her body. Alice shot a curse at another one, and Neville grabbed the now crying Lily and ran behind a desk, keeping his body between the Death Eaters and his little sister.

Harry shouted, “Reducto!” surprising his nearest foe with a direct hit to his wand hand.

“Where’d you get a wand?” shouted the injured killer and he picked up his dropped wand with his left hand.

“Crucio!” shouted another one, hitting Harry with the torture curse. He fell down shaking, and dropped his mother’s wand.

“Reducto!” both James and Alice shouted from different directions, relieving that Death Eater of his life.

At that moment, the conjured wall exploded and fifty angry-looking goblins came out and started shooting the masked figure with crossbows. Within fifteen seconds, it was over and every would-be robber was dead.

James ran over to Harry while Alice looked for Neville and Lily. Harry was still shaking when his dad got to him.

“Is it over?” he asked shakily as tears began to fall down his cheeks, unbidden. He had picked up his mother’s wand again.

James wondered if this was part of Harry becoming the vanquisher of Voldemort that the prophecy declared him to be. Of course, he wasn’t about to tell Harry that. “Yes. They’ve been stopped. I’m sorry that you had to go through that curse. You...”

“That’s not the first time I...Voldemort did it, just before...”

“I know, son,” he said as he pulled Harry into a hug and he cried on his father’s shoulder.

“Are you alright, Harry,” asked Alice a minute later. He opened his irritated eyes to see that she had Neville and Lily with her. “Neville took care of your sister. They’re both fine. I think we should have a healer check you out.”

“N-no. I’m fine. I just wanna go home.”

“We will, once we talk to the aurors.” For the first time, Harry noticed that there were five aurors inside the bank, and one of them was Sirius. They appeared to be identifying the dead Death Eaters. “You might want to put away that wand before they see it.” He took a deep breath. “We’ll talk about you sneaking it here, later.”

The aurors didn’t say anything about Harry having a wand if they did notice, but then again, Sirius was in charge. They told him what had happened and left, promising to visit him again before the summer was over.

-

Fortunately, the rest of the month was uneventful, aside from all their friends worrying about how they were. At Alice’s insistence, Harry was checked out by a Healer and given a potion to help his body recover more quickly from the curse he’d been hit with. Harry and Neville were given permission to keep their wands with them, but only to use them in emergencies. The parents knew that the kids would use their wands for other things at Hogwarts, but felt that their safety was much more important than following the rules after the scare they’d just been through. Before they knew it, the next school year was beginning.

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 31 – The Picture

“Books away. This will be a practical lesson,” said James to his class of second-year Gryffindors and Slytherins. He couldn’t help but grin at the excited expressions that many of his students had. It was a few weeks into the new term, and he’d spent the last few lessons lecturing the class, but today would be different. He usually tried to have at least one practical lesson per week. “Today, I’m going to teach you a spell that I’m sure you all will appreciate – the *wasi* spell. “Does anybody know what it is used for?”

Most of the class looked confused, but one second-year Gryffindor confidently held up his hand. Although Percy Weasley had been humbled somewhat by his experience the previous year, he still loved to know all the answers in class. “Mr. Weasley?”

Clearing his throat, Percy replied, “It is a spell used to move an object from one location to another. In this spell, intention is extremely important to direct the object to its new destination. Quite often, a prefix is added to the incantation. For example, *stolawasi* would be the incantation to send a robe into a trunk.”

“Correct,” answered James, before adding with a smirk. “Five points to Gryffindor. I’ve seen someone use the incantation, ‘*waddiwasi*’ to send a wad of bubblegum straight up Peeves’ nostril.” Half the class broke out in laughter. “I know that it may seem like this spell belongs in a Charms lesson and not defense. In fact, there is a locomotor Charm that is often used for moving objects, but this one moves them at a much faster rate. Can anyone guess the reason I’m teaching it to you?”

Percy frowned as several students had a confused expression on their faces, but James noticed that a few of them seemed to have a lamp light suddenly in their heads, and they smiled and raised their hands. He was happy to note that one of his favorite students raised his hand. “Mr. Wood?”

Oliver, appearing a bit nervous with pink ears, said, “Er, couldn’t it be used to send objects at someone who may be attacking you, sort of like Bludgers?”

“Exactly,” said James happily. He’d seen how enthusiastic Wood had been at Quidditch tryouts the previous weekend when he, Harry, and Neville had watched him. They weren’t surprised he’d made Keeper. “Take five points.” He then pointed at a table on the side of the room. “I want you to divide up into pairs of two, and each group grab one of the small beanbags. And then I want you to practice the spell, sending it at each other’s stomach. The other should try dodging so you don’t get hit, but it shouldn’t hurt much anyway. The incantation will be ‘*perawasi*.’ Remember to concentrate on your target. The wand motion goes like this.” He then pointed his wand at the pile of beanbags on the table and said, “*perawasi*,” moving his wand in a specific pattern. The result was one of the bags flying across the classroom to zoom straight into the chalkboard.

Due to the other Gryffindors pairing up too quickly, Oliver found himself paired up with a Slytherin girl with red hair and blue eyes named Michelle Ingrus. At Michelle’s insistence, Oliver went first, sending a beanbag straight at his partner, though not nearly as fast as the one Professor Potter had sent. She had no problem moving out of the way.

“Now, my turn,” she said, smiling at him. “*Perawasi!*” she said with an intensity that was reflected with the speed that her beanbag flew toward Oliver. For a moment, Gryffindor’s new Keeper forgot that he was supposed to dodge, electing to block the bag like he would a Quaffle. It hit his stomach hard, and he found himself thrown against the wall behind him. He’d tried to catch the beanbag, but only succeeded in making it fly into a painting about fifteen feet above the floor, knocking it down onto a chair that impaled the old canvas in the process. The old picture of some famous duelist had been hanging in that room for centuries, and had remained untouched until then.

“YOU IDIOT!” shouted Michelle coldly. She then smirked at him. “If that’s how you’re planning on guarding Gryffindor’s hoops, you may end up becoming Slytherin’s most valuable player in next month’s game.” The Slytherins all laughed as Wood’s face turned red as he gasped for air.

"Five points from Slytherin for that insult, Miss Ingrus," said the professor, as he walked up to Oliver and helped him up. "Are you alright, Mr. Wood? Do you need to see Madam Pomfrey?"

"Just winded," he muttered.

"L-look at that," said Percy shakily, pointing to the now-destroyed painting's previous location. His face was pale.

James Potter looked up at the section of wall that had previously been covered, and noticed something rather odd. Painted in directly on the wall was Salazar Slytherin, with his mouth open and a snake crawling in and out of it. James gasped when he realized that it looked just like in the Chamber of Secrets when the basilisk crawled out of the statue. The snake, although not moving, appeared to be looking directly into his eyes. That gave James the creeps. He had a very bad feeling about it.

"Er, class dismissed. For homework, I want six inches about the *wasi* spell and its use in combat." Percy and he exchanged a knowing look before the second-year exited the room.

Once all the students were gone, Mr. Potter left for Dumbledore's office, locking the door behind him in the process.

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"There is some sort of spell in that vicinity," said the Headmaster, after he'd performed his tenth spell on the picture, "but I am unable to determine what it is." He was riding a broomstick so that he was level with the graffiti, and James, who was on the ground with his wife, couldn't help but think how odd Albus looked in his purple robes, with his white hair and beard both hanging well below his feet in that position.

"Do you think Riddle put that there behind the painting?" asked Alice.

"It is quite possible," said Dumbledore as he continued to stare at the snake. "If that's the case, then perhaps this is some sort of Parsel-magic."

“Are you saying that only a Parselmouth like Harry would be able to unlock whatever spell is there, or at least determine what it is?” asked James with a concerned expression.

“Quite possibly,” agreed Dumbledore. “After all, that would prevent almost anyone from activating it.”

“No,” said Alice. “Harry has been through enough. I won’t have him subjected to whatever curse Voldemort put here. We should just put a new portrait over it.”

James stayed silent while the headmaster argued in his grandfatherly voice, “But Alice, if there is a danger here, we must find out what it is. If Riddle has set some sort of curse here, all of Hogwarts, including your children, may be in danger. We can take extra steps to insure young Harry’s safety.”

“What if he doesn’t want to take the risk?” asked Alice desperately looking for an excuse not to expose him to possible danger.

James looked at his wife like she’d grown a second nose. “Do you honestly think he’d turn down a chance to ride a broom again?”

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“Harry,” said James with a serious expression. “Do you remember in the Chamber of Secrets how the basilisk crawled out of Slytherin’s mouth?” He and Alice were now in their quarters with their three kids. They’d told Truby, who’d been watching the children, that she could leave for a few minutes, but they might call her back soon.

Harry seemed surprised that his dad would bring that up, but nodded while muttering, “Yeah. Why?”

After taking a deep breath, James answered, “Today in my class, a painting got knocked off the wall, and a picture of a snake crawling out of its mouth was behind it.”

Both Harry and Neville gasped at this news. “Wh-what would that be doing there?” asked Neville.

Alice answered as she held Lily, who was now sporting lime-green hair, "We believe that Voldemort painted that at some point when he was either a student here or about ten years later when he visited, before he'd revealed himself for what he is. Professor Dumbledore detected some sort of spell on the painting, but can't determine what it is." Harry noticed that his mum looked very pale.

James said, "He believes that it might be a spell that only a Parseltongue like you can understand."

Harry now was frightened as he remembered the cruciatus curse he'd recently endured, and wondered if the spell protecting that painting was something similar. "Y-you want me to go talk to some picture V-Voldemort painted. Why don't you just blast it off the wall with a reducto?"

"The headmaster is concerned that it would've been expected, and there may be some sort of defense in place that would...punish the caster."

"You mean kill them, don't you?" asked Neville.

"Yes," nodded James gravely. He then turned back to Harry. "We don't know how dangerous it is, but I, along with your mum and Professor Dumbledore, will do whatever it takes to protect you if you'll try to talk to it."

Harry appeared deep in thought. "I, I don't know. Can I think about it?"

"Of course, Harry," said Alice, looking slightly relieved. "Don't let us pressure you into it. You don't have to if you don't want to."

"Of course not," said James, but then he smirked. "By the way, the picture is about fifteen feet in the air, so you'll have to ride a broom to get close to it. You'll be using my Nimbus 1500." James didn't mention the reason for that was that it was the fastest broom they had access to, and Harry would be on it so he'd have a better chance of escaping any danger.

Harry's face lit up in excitement. "I'll do it! Can we go now?" James smirked at Alice, who glared back at her husband.

"Can I come, too?" asked Neville.

"No," said both parents at the same time.

"I, I won't go near the picture. I know that Harry's the one who can talk to it, but can I at least watch?"

Alice put her hands on Neville's shoulders and looked him in the eyes. "I'm sorry, Neville, but it's too dangerous. I wish we didn't have to take Harry. I'm sure you understand."

She kissed his forehead and he said, "Yes, Mum." She turned back to James and Harry, and didn't notice her biological son's momentary glare at all three of them. They called Truby back and headed out the door, bringing a few brooms with them. They walked in silence toward the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, where Dumbledore was already waiting for them.

"Ah, there you are. Good afternoon, young Mr. Potter. How are you?"

"A bit nervous, sir," he answered honestly.

"Quite understandable. Quite understandable. On behalf of Hogwarts, I thank you for coming." Harry nodded.

"Well," said James, "I suppose we should get right down to business. There's the picture." He pointed at the infamous graffiti and Harry paled.

Alice said, "If you're not sure you want to do this, you can still leave."

With a determined look on his face, Harry took the broom from his father's hand and mounted it. "Let's do it."

He expertly flew to right in front of the snake and stared at its eyes. He didn't even notice when his father and Dumbledore flew up beside him as a creepy feeling came over him. Determined to ignore that feeling, he hissed, "*What are you doing here?*" in snake language.

The snake hissed back, *"Guarding ssssomething the massster wantssss ssssafe."*

Harry blinked in confusion, and asked, *"How are you guarding ssssomething? There'ssss no door."*

"Oh yessss there issss. You jusssst can't ssssee it."

Deciding to test this out, he hissed, *"Open."*

Suddenly, a square section of the wall surrounding the picture began to glow with a bright light. After a second, the light faded and the section opened like a small door. Harry noticed some type of jewelry inside it for a moment before what appeared to be a bolt of lightning started coming at him. He quickly dodged out of the way, although a hole was shot through a corner of his robe.

The snake hissed, *"You did not ssssspeak the correct passssword, imposssster!"* as another bolt shot at him. He dodged this one as well.

"Fly down!" shouted Harry's dad. He complied, shooting straight down for a few seconds, while his father and Dumbledore began performing spells on the wall's opening. After pulling up, he landed next to his mum, who looked scared out of her mind. She embraced him tightly.

"Are you alright?" she asked.

"Y-yes," he managed to say as the magical blasts stopped.

Dumbledore landed beside them, holding a beautiful tiara in his hand. "I believe this is one of the items we've been searching for," he said to Alice.

Harry's eyes lit up, and he looked like he was going to say something until his mum gave him a look that he interpreted to mean, "Don't let Dumbledore know that we told you about Horcruxes."

"So, is it safe now?" he asked.

"Yes, Harry. Your father is removing that door, and then we'll fix the hole in the wall. Thank you for your help, and might I add that those

were some excellent flying moves you performed. If I didn't know better..." He looked at James with a twinkle in his eye. "...I'd say that wasn't your first time on a broom."

Harry blushed. He managed to say, "Thanks."

"Come on, Harry," said Alice. "I think we've had enough of an adventure for the day. James, I'll see you when you're finished."

"Okay, Alice."

"Bye."

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What If Snape Died? – Chapter 32 – What Happened to Bellatrix?

“Don’t tell your father I said so, but you did fly rather well,” said Alice happily as she and Harry walked through the door to their quarters, where Neville was waiting with Baby Lily and Truby.

“Thanks, mum,” said Harry, grinning. “Does that mean that I’ll be able to fly again soon?”

She giggled slightly at her stepson’s tenacity. “We’ll see,” she said noncommittally.

“I see you had some fun,” said Neville coldly. “Did Harry save the day again?”

“Neville,” said Alice with a confused expression, “What has gotten into you?”

“Since Alice Potter is being here, Truby is leaving,” piped in the elf who’d been babysitting before popping out of the room with a loud crack, waking up Lily, who began crying loudly.

Alice looked at Neville sternly. “I’m going to take care of your sister, and then we’re going to have a talk, young man.”

She walked into Lily’s room and shut the door. Harry turned to his stepbrother. “What do you mean, ‘Did I save the day?’ All I did is talk to a lousy picture.”

“Whatever,” said Neville venomously. “You know what I’m talking about. It’s always you that they need. You’re the hero, the Boy-Who-Lived that everybody wants to meet. The one who can even befriend people like Malfoy. Even my own mum likes you better than me.”

“That’s not true!” argued Harry, but Neville continued as his face reddened.

“You’re the great hero who can fight Death Eaters...”

“And got crucio’d for it!” Now Harry’s face was gaining color.

“You got to go to the Chamber of Secrets while I was left behind!”

“And was attacked by a basilisk!” At this point, Harry’s voice was rising as he got angrier.

“That you killed, getting a stupid award for services to the school in the process!” yelled Neville.

“I don’t care about...”

“They even let you ride a broom today, when you weren’t supposed to for three more years!”

“And got curses shot at me! You wouldn’t have had the guts to get on a broom in the first place!”

Before Harry knew it, Neville’s fist had made contact with his jaw, sending him backwards three feet. The Boy-Who-Lived managed to stay on his feet and lunge at his brother, giving him what was sure to be a black eye.

They were still trading punches when the door to the baby’s room opened, revealing a very angry woman brandishing a wand. “Petrificus Totalus!” she said, managing to hit both boys with the same hex. They fell like wooden planks to the floor.

She got even angrier when she saw the bloody noses and bruises on both boys’ faces. She closed Lily’s door and levitated the fighters to separate chairs in their common room. “Listen up, because I’m only gonna say this one time,” she said calmly. “I will not tolerate fighting. I will ask each of you in turn to explain your side of it.” She then released both boys from her hex, and both their expressions changed to fear the moment their faces could move. “Harry, you first.”

“I knew you’d pick him first!” yelled Neville.

“Of course I’m picking him first,” she said, angrily. “You’re the one who seemed to be looking for a fight when we got back.”

Harry said, “Neville is jealous that I’ve been crucio’d more times than him!”

She looked confused at that answer. "What?"

Harry continued. "He seems to think that I *enjoy* those *adventures* I've had..." Harry's tone was dripping with sarcasm when he said the word 'enjoy.' "...so he's jealous that I've had them while he's stayed here safe in our quarters having a keen time while I'm being cursed."

Understanding began to dawn on her. Despite the colorful way Harry put it, she began to realize that Neville had been feeling 'left out' of the adventures. "Who threw the first punch?"

"Neville."

She then turned to her biological son. "Is that true?"

"I'm not jealous of *him*!" he said with a nasty expression.

"Did you punch him first?"

"Maybe."

She sighed and performed first aid on their cuts with her wand, but left the bruises on them. "Both of you, go to your rooms. I'll let you know what your punishments are after I talk to your father."

"Me!" shouted Harry angrily. "What did I do? He hit me first!"

"Now!" said Alice firmly. Both of her boys stormed off to their rooms and slammed their doors.

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Alice sat on her couch, looking very worried. She was wondering if she'd become a bad mother. She only wanted to protect her children. She thought she had made it clear that she hadn't wanted Harry involved in the Horcrux hunt or Chamber of Secrets business, but it had been necessary. Now, she wasn't so sure of herself anymore, since Neville obviously hadn't understood her intentions. The door to their quarters opened, revealing her husband.

“James,” she said, quickly walking up to him, “We have a problem with the children.”

-

Harry was lying on his bed reading a muggle book called *The Silver Chair* when he heard a knock on his door. “Come in.”

The door opened to reveal his dad standing in the doorway. “Hi, Harry. I heard there was some excitement here earlier.

“Just Neville jealous of me getting shot at,” he said without looking at his father.

“I doubt that’s that Neville’s jealous of that aspect of your adventures, but you’ve got to admit that parts of them are exciting.”

“I suppose,” he grumbled.

“Son, look at me when I’m talking to you.”

“Fine,” he turned to face his dad.

“Now admit it. You enjoyed flying today, even when you were being shot at. I saw your face. You looked like you were playing Quidditch and avoiding Bludgers.”

Harry couldn’t help the slight smile that came on his face. “Maybe a little.”

“Harry,” said James, putting a hand on his shoulder, “It’s perfectly natural to enjoy adventures, even when they are dangerous.” He decided to quickly add, “That doesn’t mean that you should go looking for trouble.”

“I suppose.”

“There is a certain thrill to avoiding danger, and that’s part of what Neville’s jealous of.”

“Hmm,” said Harry, eloquently.

"You like going with us on adventures, no matter how dangerous they are, and you don't like it when you're left behind. Admit it."

"Okay, okay. I guess I can see why he's jealous, but it's not my fault."

"I agree," said James. "It's not your fault, and neither is your fame."

"I didn't want..." Harry began.

"I know you didn't want it. But think about it. Neville lost his dad, but didn't get famous for it. You lost your mum and became an instant celebrity that people like to stare at and call a hero. Now Neville is known as the stepbrother of the Boy-Who-Lived, and it will take a lot of work for him to overcome that association so that he can be known for something that he accomplishes."

"I don't..."

"How would you like everyone to point at you and say, 'That's Neville's stepbrother. Do you think he can introduce us?'"

Harry chuckled a bit at that.

"My point is, Harry, that you've got to try to understand Neville's point of view. I know that jealousy isn't right, and it's not your fault, but you have to try to be more understanding." He took a deep breath. "I think that's good advice for dealing with anybody. Try to understand where they're coming from."

"Alright, dad."

"Good. Now, your mum and I have decided not to punish you, but we do want you to try to get along with your brother."

-

At the same time, Neville and Alice were in his room talking. "I know that Harry has gotten to go on a few more adventures than you because he's a Parselmouth, and I wasn't happy about letting him go, but it's not his fault. I've never heard him gloat about it. Have you?"

“No, but he...”

“He probably has enjoyed those quests more than he’ll admit, but can you honestly blame him for that?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“I want you to understand that we’re not favoring him. We’d prefer it if both of you were left behind. However, the fact that he’s the only Parselmouth we know has made it necessary to bring him along. I can’t promise that we won’t need him again, either.” She hugged her son tightly. “I just want you to understand that I don’t think you’re any less capable than Harry. He just has one talent that none of us has. As far as his fame goes, you know that he doesn’t want it.”

“Yes, mum. I know.”

“Then you’re going to have to apologize to him.”

He nodded.

“And you’re grounded for a week.”

“But mum...”

“Don’t ‘mum’ me. I will not tolerate my children fighting. If Harry had thrown the first punch, then he’d be the one grounded. I’d have punished you both until your dad asked me if I’d just stand there and let someone hit me.” Neville gave a small grin. “Since I wouldn’t do that, I can’t expect Harry to, either.”

“I guess,” said Neville.

“Now get up. We’re going to get this apology over with so the matter is settled.”

-

Within a minute, the whole family was in their living room. Neville looked at the ground nervously.

“Neville,” said James, “Do you have something to say?”

“Er, Harry.” He looked up at his brother. “Harry, I’m sorry I hit you, and I’m sorry I got jealous.”

“That’s okay,” said Harry. “The jealous part – not the hitting me part. I can understand why you might get jealous when I go on these adventures, but you’ve got to know that if I had my way, you’d come, too. As far as hitting me goes, I forgive you, but if you do it again, I’ll kick your...”

“Harry James Potter!” yelled Alice.

“I, I mean I forgive you, Nev,” stammered Harry under his mum’s sharp gaze. Neville and James both laughed.

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A few days later, Hermione had her birthday party at the Burrow. Neville was allowed to bring her a present and wish her a happy birthday, but then had to return to Hogwarts, where Truby made sure he stayed out of trouble.

Mr. and Mrs. Granger were at the party, along with all the Weasleys not at Hogwarts. Luna Lovegood was also there, along with the Potters (aside from Neville). Marissa Granger and Molly Weasley seemed to be in a competition over who would hold Lily the most.

The group spent a few hours at the pond, where they seemed to separate into small groups playing different little games. Fred and George kept jumping into the pond and seeing how silly-looking a dive they could do. Harry and Ginny got into a game where they’d try to catch each other’s feet under the water and tickle them. Luna and Hermione were playing ‘monkey in the middle’ using a Quaffle with Ron trying unsuccessfully to get the ball from them. The men were enjoying the water, but mainly talking as they watched to make sure none of the kids got into trouble. The women were staying out of the water with the baby. Eventually, James got all the kids to play a game of water volleyball.

After the game, they had a campfire outside, where the Grangers were intrigued to see Arthur use a spell to light the fire. They were even further amazed to watch the adults levitate hot dogs,

hamburgers and marshmallows over the fire to cook. Once dinner was eaten, the cake was brought outside (after an anti-insect charm was placed on it). After blowing out the nine candles successfully, Hermione got the first piece of cake, and was reminded to brush her teeth immediately after she was done eating by her parents. After that, she opened her presents and thanked everyone for the many books that she received, and shortly thereafter, the party ended.

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A few weeks later, the entire Potter clan minus Lily (who was being watched by Truby because they didn't think she'd like to be in that crowd), along with Hermione, climbed into the Gryffindor section of the stands at the Quidditch pitch. The family found Arthur and Molly Weasley sitting there with Bill, Percy, Fred, George, Ron and Ginny. Charlie, as captain and Seeker, was with his team in the changing room.

"Hello, Weasleys," said James happily.

"Hi, James," said Arthur. "Hello, Alice, Neville, Harry, and Hermione."

After the greetings were exchanged, they took their seats, and the game began.

"Welcome to the first Quidditch game of the year. It's Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff! The teams are now flying out into the pitch. The new Gryffindor captain, Charlie Weasley, (Many people cheered, but none more loudly than the Weasleys) who is an excellent Seeker, is in the front, followed by..." the list went on, until finally he reached the last Gryffindor player. "...And making his debut as Keeper, Oliver Wood!" James cheered loudly for his favorite second-year.

After the Hufflepuff team was announced, the two captains shook hands. The balls were released and the game began. A Hufflepuff Chaser got the Quaffle first, and immediately took off toward the hoops, avoiding Bludgers shot at her by the Gryffindor Beaters.

"Christina Banner does a Sloth Grip Roll to successfully avoid another Bludger. She's quite attractive. Sorry, Professor. It looks like the Hufflepuff Beaters have finally woken up, Sorry, Professor, and

are closing in to help Banner. Wood is about to get his first test. She shoots. He's flying toward it. Uh-oh. A Bludger has been shot at him. I don't think he's seen it. Wood catches the Quaffle..." Many people from Gryffindor cheer. "And he's hit in the head by a Bludger. That had to hurt. Oh no! He's fallen off his broom! Professor Dumbledore is casting a spell on him while Charlie Weasley is calling a time out."

James was on his feet watching Oliver being levitated off the field. He'd gotten enough Quidditch injuries of his own to believe that Oliver would be fine, but he still was naturally concerned. He looked around to see Hermione and Ginny in tears from the awful sight while the younger boys were pale. He wasn't sure whether to leave or not when the announcer said, "One of Gryffindor's Chasers, Aaron Tolkien, will be playing as Keeper, and the game is about to resume."

Within a minute, Madam Hooch blew her whistle and the match continued. Aaron may have been a good Chaser, but he wasn't very good as Keeper. He did manage to save a few goals, but let in a lot more. At the same time, Gryffindor's Chasers were missing a person, so they weren't working as well as usual. A half hour after the action resumed, Hufflepuff had a hundred-seventy points while Gryffindor only had thirty. However, James smiled as he saw Charlie Weasley start flying down at the fastest speed his broom could travel.

The teacher started looking to see if Charlie was fainting or not when Harry exclaimed, "He's headed for the Snitch! It's just ahead of him! Look!"

He grinned when Charlie's hand reached out, proving that his son was correct. He grabbed the Snitch and ended the game, gaining a slim victory over Hufflepuff. With the match over, James declared, "I'm gonna visit Oliver in the hospital wing," and slipped away as fast as he could.

An hour later, when he met back up with his family, he was happy to announce that although Wood had cracked his skull, he was expected to fully recover, although he was still unconscious. He woke up in the Hospital Wing a few days later.

Term went by quickly as usual, and in early December, the headmaster asked James and Alice for a meeting.

"Hello, James, Alice. Thank you for coming. Would either of you care for a lemon drop?"

"No thanks," they said together.

"Very well. How have your classes been going?" Albus asked politely.

"Alright," said James.

"Fine," replied Alice.

"How are your children doing? Well, I hope."

"Oh, yes," said Alice. "The boys are at the Burrow right now, and Lily is growing so fast it seems like I have to enlarge her clothes every day."

James added, "Minerva's watching her now, by the way. When she delivered your message, she volunteered to baby-sit."

"She really wanted to do it," said Alice with a grin.

"Wonderful," said Dumbledore, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"How are you doing, sir?"

"In excellent form, Alice."

"So," said James, "to what do we owe this meeting?"

"I believe I've located another Horcrux, and you'll never guess where it is," answered Dumbledore with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Where?" asked Alice.

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"Boys, we've decided to take our holiday in Venice, Italy. The Grangers will be accompanying us, along with Professor

Dumbledore,” said James. They were in their quarters a few days later, after having made proper arrangements for the trip.

“Dumbledore?” asked Harry, surprised.

“I didn’t think he ever took a holiday,” said Neville.

“Of course he does,” said their mother. “He needs a holiday as much as anybody else.”

“Even more, I’d say, considering the stress he’s under,” added James.

“That’s fine,” said Harry. “We were just surprised is all.”

“So,” said Neville with a grin. “Can you tell us about Venice?”

-

Dumbledore set the children in front of him then sat down in his chair. They were inside his office on the day before the trip, and he thought it important to have a quick chat with them.

“As you know, I’m coming on holiday to Venice with you. I need some time away from this place. Don’t get me wrong, I love my job, but it can get tiresome at times,” Dumbledore began. “Now, it will sound suspicious to observant people if they hear you calling your parents ‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’ and me ‘Professor.’ I would therefore like you to call me Granddad Albus.”

“We can do that, sir,” Hermione said.

“Will we be able to call you Granddad Albus here at Hogwarts after we get back?” asked Harry with a smile.

“Cheeky,” Dumbledore said with a laugh.

-

The group went to Edinburgh Airport to make their flight to Venice. Everyone was wearing Muggle clothing. Dumbledore looked really different; hardly anyone would have recognized him. He was wearing

a Muggle suit and had used a charm to trim his hair and beard so it looked more sensible.

After the checkout, the party boarded the plane. The children sat together while the adults sat together, with Alice holding baby Lily.

A few hours later, the plane landed at *Aeroporto di Venezia Marco Polo* (Venice Marco Polo Airport). Dumbledore explained to the children that the airport was named after explorer Marco Polo who came from Venice. He was apparently a wizard from the 13th Century who gained fame for being one of the first Westerners to travel the Silk Road to China. He then spent seventeen years working for the Mighty Kublai Khan of the Mongol Empire. Hermione listened intently to every word he said.

"Are there any books about him, Granddad Albus?" she asked.

"There is one called *Il Milione*, otherwise known in our language as 'The Travels of Marco Polo.' I'll dig it out for you when we get back home. Our editions cover his magical abilities."

"Thank you," Hermione said, giving him a hug.

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They used a water taxi to go from the airport to *Piazza San Marco* (St Mark's Square). The children were told to be very careful here because during high rains or the *Acqua Alta*, several lower areas of Venice (including the square) flood.

The group walked through the markets of Rialto to head for their hotel when Dumbledore and James stopped.

"Did you just sense it?" James asked. Dumbledore nodded and then they rejoined the party.

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That night, the Grangers went down to the bar after the kids had been put to bed. Dumbledore, Alice and James held a conference in the dining room.

"I'm sure I sensed a Muggle-repelling charm," James told them. Dumbledore agreed.

"What do we know about that area?" Alice asked.

"The *Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo* is in that area, or rather was. Two years ago, in the Muggle news, it was reported that the palace disappeared without a trace. None of the Venetian Muggle authorities were able to locate it. My contact has reported seeing Bellatrix Lestrange in the area as well," Dumbledore said.

"You knew this and let us bring the Grangers AND the children here?" James shouted.

"James, please keep your voice down. We can't let the children know the real reason for our trip," Dumbledore said, not knowing James and Alice had already told the children about Horcruxes. They just didn't know that this trip was actually a Horcrux expedition. "Bellatrix has not been seen for a year. But it makes sense. She was high up in Voldemort's circle of Death Eaters. He would have given her something to hide. As you know, her husband was killed in the battle where Tom was vanquished. She disappeared before she could be captured, but a goblin I know saw her at Gringotts later that day, while everybody was too busy celebrating Voldemort's defeat to notice her. I'm convinced that money isn't the only thing she took from her vault."

"You think she removed a Horcrux?" asked James.

"Yes. The only thing she had left was her faith in her master's return. She could have hidden the Horcrux in the *Palazzo* when she came here and put Muggle-repelling charms on it. She's probably still in the area guarding it."

"It seems weird, though. If I were hiding something for Voldemort, I would have placed the hiding place under Fidelius," Alice said. "Not Muggle repelling charms."

"There is a chance she deliberately didn't use Fidelius because she wished to lay a trap," Dumbledore said.

“Then we will tell the Grangers what we dare, and ask them to watch the children while we investigate the area,” James said.

“We will need to proceed with caution. She could be anyone anywhere here in Venice. She could have killed someone to gain hairs for Polyjuice potion, or knowing her style, kidnapped someone and kept them alive using Imperius so she could interrogate them and for good measure, use the Cruciatus curse just for kicks,” said Alice.

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After asking the Grangers to take the children to some magical bookstores, Dumbledore, James and Alice went to the Rialto. They walked to the Campo Manin, then took a turn and felt magic as they walked through the Muggle repelling charms. Then they could see the *Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo*. It was in a state of disrepair. They could see a huge spiral staircase leading to four floors. There were massive arches.

Carefully, they walked up the stairs. James stopped. The others followed suit.

“Do you get the feeling we’re being watched?” he asked. Alice and Dumbledore nodded.

Slowly, they searched all of the first three floors but found nothing. They then made their way up the stairs to the final floor. James turned and began to make his way down the stairs.

“Love, I think we should go and collect the kids. I’m sure there is something else we can do,” he said. Alice stopped him and looked at Dumbledore.

“Looks like this entire floor is warded,” Dumbledore said. He took out his wand and cast a spell. He then took Alice’s hand, who took James’ hand, and led them up the rest of the stairs onto the fourth floor. There was only one room still in one piece on this floor. James and Alice turned to face the ‘windows’ and saw a charming panoramic view over most of the rooftops of the city.

Dumbledore led the way into the final room. There, standing on a big box in the centre of the room was a helmet. It was made of silver and was designed to be worn by someone with a lot of hair. When worn, it would cover all the hair, and there was a ridge that would cover the entire nose. The ridge on the front ended just above the eyebrows. There were what looked like metal lion's ears on either side, and an engraving of eyes on the front. It showed Gryffindor's fascination with lions and why the crest of Gryffindor House was a lion.

The trio looked at it in awe. There in front of them was the legendary helmet of Gryffindor, not seen for hundreds of years. Each of them began casting detection charms to find any traps and unset them. When they finally believe that it was safe, Albus stepped forward.

He sighed. "It does seem a pity to destroy such priceless historical relics, but Tom gave us no choice once he desecrated them with his twisted soul." He then pulled a small pouch out of his pocket and extracted a large fang from it. "It is fortunate that we now have an alternative to Fiendfyre to destroy these abominations." He then stabbed the helmet on the top, creating a huge hole in the relic. A faint scream of pain emanating from the Horcrux was then heard by the trio.

"I'm glad that's done," said James with a grin.

His wife added, "That makes all six."

Dumbledore stood perfectly still for a moment before he declared. "Something is wrong here. We must leave at once."

The building began to shake as the magical feedback from the destroyed Horcrux shot into the palace. The trio ran down the stairs as fast as they could as the palace began to fall to the ground.

Red light fired at them as they walked away from the slowly collapsing building. Shields were cast which absorbed the stunners. In front of them was Bellatrix Lestrange.

"Morning, Dumbledore," she said as she fired another stunner. She looked around and saw James and Alice. "Hello, James." He fired a stunner at her but she got a shield up.

“Is this dear, sweet Lily’s replacement? CRUCIO!” The torture curse hit Alice before either James or Dumbledore could do anything.

“REDUCTO!” yelled James angrily, directly hitting Bellatrix with his spell. The force of the spell was enough to send her into the almost collapsed building. The final bricks fell on top of her, and she screamed as the building’s destruction killed her.

-

The trio got back to the hotel just before the Grangers and the children returned. They had cleared up all evidence of what they had been up to. They knew that if the children found out they had been hunting down a Horcrux and not said anything, they would get mad. Dumbledore had used *Incendio* on Bellatrix’s remains. The remains of Gryffindor’s helmet were shrunk and put in one of his pockets.

“Adam, Marissa, I’ve arranged for a gondola trip for you down the Grand Canal this afternoon. Alice and I are booked for one, too,” James said.

“Thank you,” Adam said.

“Does that mean?” Harry asked.

“Granddad Albus – are you baby-sitting?” Neville asked.

“Can you tell us the story of Marco Polo, please, Granddad Albus?” Hermione asked.

Dumbledore smiled as the trio sat on the floor in front of him, looking forward to hearing a story. The four adults left the room as Dumbledore began to tell the story of Marco Polo.

-

The rest of the holiday went by without incident, and before long they were back at Hogwarts, the kids none the wiser about the true nature of the trip. Dumbledore, James, and Alice were having a meeting the Headmaster had called them to on the first Saturday after classes resumed.

"I've called you here to discuss another necessity of Voldemort's complete defeat," he said grimly, once they'd gotten past the normal pleasantries.

Alice said, "Don't tell me you want Harry to face him now. I had a hard enough time involving Harry in the parts of the Horcrux hunt that we had to. I am not going to let him face Voldemort until he's much older! I'm just glad that the Horcruxes are gone."

"I agree," said James firmly. "We've done what we could, and naturally will continue training Harry for when he does have to fight. The Horcruxes are all gone, so we can now relax for awhile."

Dumbledore's expression became very somber. "I'm afraid that there is one other Horcrux that I haven't told you about until now."

"What?" asked James, confused.

"I'm afraid that a segment of Riddle's damaged soul was separated from him when his killing curse bounced back at him, and took shelter inside young Harry."

-

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 33 – Harry's a What?

"WHAT!?!!" screamed Alice as her face reddened in fury. "Are you saying that Harry is a Horcrux?"

"What are you playing at, Dumbledore?" shouted James angrily. His face was as red as his wife's. "My son..."

"Calm yourselves," interrupted Dumbledore. Fawkes began making a clucking noise, obviously disturbed by the yelling.

"I will NOT calm myself!" spat Alice. "You want to kill one of my sons!" She didn't realize it, but she'd pulled out her wand and was pointing it at her boss.

"I won't allow you to TOUCH Harry!" said James while he glared at the old man.

"I have no intention of..."

"You want him and Voldemort to kill each other, don't you?" hissed Alice, with a look of horror on her face. "No wonder you didn't mind risking his life!" Fawkes squawked loudly and disappeared in a flash of fire.

Albus closed his eyes and nodded solemnly. "There's nothing else we can do."

He reopened his eyes when Alice slapped him across the face. "Says you! I'll bet you haven't even tried to come up with a way to destroy the Horcrux without killing Harry, have you?"

Dumbledore paled. "There is no other way. It would be in the..."

James hollered, "Just because no way is in that book, doesn't mean there isn't one!"

"Just how many cases of human beings having Horcruxes put in them have been studied..." she demanded, "...that you're so sure it can't be destroyed without killing him?"

“Er, well, none. But...”

“But NOTHING!” she screamed. “I’m going to find a way to do that, and I’ll thank you to not murder my son in the meantime!” She then turned on her heel and marched out of the office, slamming the door in the process.

James was still glaring at the headmaster. “I’ve ALWAYS trusted you, Dumbledore! And now you...”

“James, please,” the aged professor implored, “I do not wish young Harry to die. He is an exceptional youth.” He sighed. “If there were any other way...”

“There WILL be!” spat James. “Alice and I will find a way!”

Taking a deep breath, the headmaster replied sadly, “I sincerely hope you are successful.”

“We will be,” said James confidently, although that’s not how he really felt.

“You may, of course, borrow any reading materials that I have on the subject.”

Sighing, Harry’s dad said, “I appreciate that,” and walked out of the room without another word.

-

About fifteen minutes later, James Potter opened the door to his wife’s office. He’d checked their quarters first and didn’t find her there and asked their elf to keep watching Lily for awhile longer. The boys were at the Burrow, yet again. He was actually glad of that. He and Alice would have a day to get used to the idea of Harry having a Horcrux inside him. Right now, he thought he would burst into tears the moment he saw his son.

It didn’t take long for him to figure out where his wife had gone to after that. When he opened the door, he found her sitting at her desk with her head hidden behind her copy of *Advanced Potion Making*.

He wasn't sure if she'd heard him come in or not until she said, "I wonder if a variation of the *Draught of Living Death* could take care of the problem. Of course, it would have to be altered dramatically. It may be better to invent a new potion."

"Solve the problem?" he repeated, surprised. "We're talking about Harry's life."

She sighed and put the book down, revealing her watery, red eyes. There were wet trails on her cheeks where her tears had flowed down. "I know what we're talking about," she said, "but it's easier to think of it as just a problem that needs to be solved – and there is a solution!"

"Of course there is," James agreed with a faint hint of a smile. "That sounds like the way Sirius and I refer to Remus' *furry little problem*."

"Exactly," she said, taking a deep breath. Her voice was slightly cracked, and it was obvious to her husband that she was close to crying again. He walked up to where she was sitting and squatted down, facing her. "We'll find a way," he whispered before engulfing her in a hug.

"How are we going to face Harry?" she sobbed onto his shoulder.

Sighing, James said, "We're not gonna tell him until we have a solution. I know I can't tell him that."

"Could you imagine how knowing that could affect an eight-year-old boy?" she asked. "We've got to keep it secret."

-

Eight-year-old Harry Potter was lying in a bed that wasn't his own, and staring at the darkness. It certainly wasn't his first time sleeping at the Burrow. He and Neville had been spending weekends there regularly for the past few years. He was in Bill's bed while Neville was in Charlie's. They were in the room the two Weasley brothers shared. From the snores coming from that direction, Harry concluded that his step-brother was asleep.

He'd woken up about a half-hour before, and from the darkness, he knew it was the middle of the night. As the constant snoring prevented him from going back to sleep, he wished he'd been in Percy's room. He finally gave it up as a bad job and grabbed his glasses, put on a pair of slippers, and walked out the door. He thought maybe a stroll outside would help cure his insomnia.

He had barely taken two steps into the back yard when he realized he wasn't alone. A fast blur of red and blue was moving in the sky. It only took him a moment to realize it was the youngest Weasley on a broomstick. She was wearing a light blue nightgown with her hair moving freely in the wind. He watched as she noticed him and flew to right in front of where he was standing.

"Ginny?" he whispered. "What are you..."

"Over here, away from the house. Hop on. We'll get there faster."

Wordlessly, he complied and got on behind her, putting his arms around her waist. He didn't know why, but he blushed furiously while doing so. He couldn't see her face, but she was doing the same thing as she flew them near the pond and landed. After they dismounted, he looked at his friend expectantly.

"After mum put that new lock on the broom shed, it took me until Bill was back from school before I could sneak a broom again. Once he was back, I *borrowed* one of his schoolbooks and learned the charm to open it."

Harry found himself smiling at her, clearly impressed. "I'm glad that accident didn't turn you off flying."

"Never," she declared solemnly. "Now, you've got to swear not to tell anyone that I know how to get in the broom shed!" she demanded.

"Of course not," he promised, "as long as I get to fly, too. I also promise not to run into you again."

The seven-year-old girl slightly blushed. "I know that if you do, you'll simply catch me again."

He blushed in response, but then hurried to the broom shed to grab another old broom, and the two of them enjoyed flying together until dawn.

The next morning, they were both tired, but did their best to hide it.

-

“Hogwarts. Defense Against the Dark Arts Office,” said Harry, as he threw floo powder down to follow Neville back home. Over the last few years of regularly flooing, he’d gotten used to the sensation, and more importantly, learned to land on his feet.

As he was dusting himself off, he found himself engulfed in a tight hug. It took him a moment to realize what was happening as he struggled to breathe in the embrace. “Mum?” he managed to mumble.

Alice released him and asked, “How are you? I’ve missed you.” For some reason that Harry couldn’t understand, she seemed ready to cry as she looked at him.

“I’m fine. Are you alright?”

His dad spoke up while putting a hand on his wife’s shoulder, and Harry had the distinct impression that it was to change the subject. “Did you boys have a good time? Let’s get back to our quarters.”

-

It was over a month since that day. Harry and Ginny had made a habit of flying together any night that he stayed at the Burrow, which was every two weeks. Both of Harry’s parents had been acting strangely around him – especially Alice – who had seemed ready to burst into tears at the sight of him, and spent a lot more time in her office than usual. His father would smile whenever they were together, but the smile didn’t reach his eyes. Both Harry and Neville knew that something strange was going on, but when they asked, their parents would pretend that nothing out of the ordinary was happening.

One benefit of this was that a few days after the strange behavior began, James and Alice had decided to let Harry start flying again

and bought him his own brand new Nimbus 1800 – a better broom than he had – and had begun giving Harry flying lessons that soon became Quidditch lessons as James realized that his son didn't need lessons on riding a broom. He helped Harry learn the finer points of all the Quidditch positions, realizing that it helped to be versatile if you wanted to make your house team. He, himself had played two different positions during his Hogwarts years – Chaser and Seeker. He still had every Snitch he'd caught in the later position, but for some reason, they wouldn't let him keep the Quaffle when he played the other.

James had also involved Neville, teaching him the basics of flying on his broom (knowing that his stepson didn't like flying, he'd bought him a different present – an exotic plant that cost about the same as the broom), but his stepson really didn't enjoy it. He'd overheard Hermione agreeing with Neville that it was dangerous when they'd told her about it.

Currently, Neville, Harry and Hermione were on their way back to James' office. They'd had a lesson and then played outside for an hour. Then all three of the kids were going to the Burrow for the weekend. They were currently discussing the strange behavior of the boys' parents. Hermione was biting her lip with her brow furrowed.

"It seems to me that there are only two possible explanations. One is that they are thinking of separating and don't want you two to know about it. That would explain why she spends so much time away from your quarters."

"But they still do all that gross lovey-dovey stuff like kissing," said Neville.

Their female friend looked nervous as she looked straight at Harry. "Er, well, the only other thing I can think of is...never mind."

"What?" demanded Harry.

"Well, what if they found out something...that maybe you were...sick, or even dying?"

The Boy-Who-Lived was speechless as his mouth dropped open. He wanted to argue with her, but realized that it did make sense.

"No," said Neville. "That can't be it. Mum and Dad would've told us..."

"Maybe your parents are different," she argued, "but my parents don't like to tell me bad things like someone is going to die."

"That must be it," whispered Harry softly so they barely heard that he'd regained his power of speech. His face was pale, and his eyes appeared moist. "That's why they suddenly let me start flying again. They want to, er, enjoy what little time I have left."

Hermione flung her arms around her first real friend as she began to cry. "I could be wrong. There could be a million other reasons..."

"By why is mum gone so much," asked Neville, not wanting to believe it. "I'd think she'd want to spend time with us."

Hermione let go of Harry as she considered this for about thirty seconds. "Sh-she is a Potions Mistress. Wh-what if she's making a cure?"

"If there were a cure, they wouldn't be..." argued Harry.

"Maybe she's inventing one," declared Neville proudly. "Mum's brilliant. I'm sure she'll be able to cure anything you got."

At this point, they reached the door to James Potter's office. Harry reached out to the doorknob, but before he had touched it, he heard his father's voice.

"Have you made any progress, Alice?" Harry pulled back his hand and listened. His companions joined him.

"I'm afraid not. I'm in unmapped territory. I don't think anybody's ever put a Horcrux inside a human being before, so naturally there's no advice on removing it." Harry gasped as both Neville and Hermione glanced at his scar.

"Do you have any ideas at all?" James said.

“I, I have been wondering if basilisk venom would help as an ingredient.”

“Wouldn’t that kill Harry?”

They heard Alice sigh. “Possibly. I’ll have to find a way to prevent it, won’t I? But it does destroy Horcruxes.” They’d previously harvested everything they could from the basilisk Harry had killed, which is why Dumbledore had the fang to destroy Gryffindor’s helmet.

Having heard enough, Harry pulled open the door. His parents immediately stopped talking. Without looking at them, he walked straight to his room and slammed the door.

Judging by the solemn expressions on the other two kids’ faces, James asked, “You heard what we were talking about, didn’t you?”

-

Harry glared at the lightning-shaped scar on his forehead with more contempt than ever before as he stood in front of the full length mirror in his room. To think that he was holding a piece of the murderer who killed his mum – helping to make sure he couldn’t die – made him so furious. He watched his face redden as tears began to fall from his eyes. He screamed in rage as the mirror shattered in a burst of accidental magic.

He thought about pulling his mum’s wand out and shooting a reducto at his scar, but figured that wouldn’t help. He punched the wall in frustration as tears flowed freely from his bloodshot eyes and didn’t notice the door open behind him.

“Harry?” said James.

“I HATE HIM!!! I HATE HIM!!!! How could he do that to me!?! It wasn’t enough that he killed mummy,” he sniffed as his father embraced his crying son, “he had to make me a Horcrux! How?”

“Professor Dumbledore thinks it was accidental when the curse rebounded,” said Alice, who was standing in the doorway.

Harry sniffed again. "So I'll have to die?"

"No. I'm going to find another way," promised Alice quickly.

"But if you can't," Harry said firmly, "I'll have to die."

He sighed miserably. He felt even worse now than he had when his mum had died. He had part of his mum's murderer's soul inside him. He hated himself.

James said, "I think I'll tell the Weasleys that you don't feel up to visiting them today."

"No," said Harry, wiping his tears with his sleeve. "I want to go do something. Maybe Mrs. Weasley will let me degnome the garden. That should be fun."

James gave his son a momentary smile. He knew that Harry was far from over the shock, but couldn't help but be amused at the thought of his son hurling unsuspecting gnomes a kilometer away while letting out his anger. He also thought it might be good for Harry to be with his friends. "Alright, but you can come back any time you want if you don't feel like staying."

He hugged his son again, and then Alice hugged Harry as well. She looked him in the eyes. "I promise I'll find a way. We're not going to sacrifice you to Voldemort."

-

"Take that!" Harry shouted as he tossed his twelfth gnome over the Burrow's fence. This one had actually managed to bite him. It wasn't a bad bite and didn't draw blood, but it had hurt.

"Harry," asked a feminine voice from behind him.

He turned to see Ginny Weasley. "Hi," he responded.

"Are you sure you don't want to play hide and seek?"

“Not this game,” he said as he began approaching another gnome. “Gotcha!” He grabbed the small creature by the hand and tossed it over the fence in one motion.

“Good throw,” she commented.

“Thanks.”

“What’s wrong?” she asked timidly.

“Nothing.”

“Don’t lie. If nothin’ was wrong, you’d want to be ‘it.’ Neville and Hermione know, but won’t tell me. They said to leave you alone.”

“That’s good advice,” he shot back, causing her ears to turn pink, but she stood her ground. He then moved toward an unusually clever gnome that was hiding behind a bush.

“I *thought* we were friends.”

“We are. I just...”

“Then why won’t you tell me?” she asked, looking as though she wanted to cry even though she was practically shouting. “Don’t you trust me?” she asked more timidly.

He sighed and turned back toward her, ignoring the hidden gnome. “It’s not that. I do trust you. I’m just not allowed to talk about it. Mum and Dad aren’t happy Hermione, Neville and I know about it, either.”

The girl looked in deep thought for a few moments. “What can you tell me? Come on. I promise I won’t tell anyone, not even Ron, who by the way hasn’t noticed anything wrong and is just glad that you’re doing our work.”

“Er, I guess I could say a little. I just found out I...” he looked up at the sky while trying to explain himself without revealing his knowledge of Horcruxes. “It’s like I’m dying...from when I got my scar, and no one knows a cure.”

His friend gasped in horror. “When You-Know-Who tried to kill you, everyone said you was fine except the scar, but something did happen to you.”

“Yeah,” he nodded. “Something did happen to me. Mum’s trying to find a cure, but...” He stopped when he was engulfed in a hug, which he returned. He could hear his friend sobbing.

“That’s so awful,” she said between sobs. After about ten seconds of holding each other, she managed to ask, “How long do you have until...” She couldn’t continue.

“They don’t know. I feel fine now. It could be a long time – several years.” He didn’t want her afraid that he was about to keel over dead at any moment.

“I, I’m sure Aunt Alice will find a cure, and then you’ll live to be as old as Dumbledore,” she said, trying to sound confident.

“Yeah,” he nodded. “Remember not to tell anybody.”

“I, I won’t. I guess you won’t be playing...”

“I can play just the same as always. That won’t matter. It won’t make me die faster or anything. I can still get into just as much trouble as always.”

She managed a small smile. “That’s good. Why don’t you play hide-and-seek with us? You can be it.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Alright.” They then joined the others.

-

For the next two and a half years, Alice Potter worked relentlessly to create a cure for Harry’s Horcrux that wouldn’t kill him. She was convinced that she could invent a potion that would do it. James fully supported her, but made sure that she took a break every now and then before she wore herself ragged.

Harry's moods would swing from happy and hopeful to miserable, and it seemed that only Ginny could pull him out of his depressions that he'd end up in every few months. It seemed odd to Neville and Hermione that he was closer to Ginny than Ron, but whenever it was brought up to either, they'd turn red and get defensive.

Luna Lovegood mentioned once that her mother had been asked to do some dangerous spell research by the Ministry of Magic, but had turned down the offer.

-

Finally, a few weeks before Harry's eleventh birthday, Alice Potter told him that she thought she'd made a potion that would safely destroy his Horcrux.

He was lying without his glasses on a bed in a closed-off section of the hospital wing. His hands and feet were secured so that he wouldn't be able to move much during the process. Madam Pomfrey had simply been told that there was a terrible, dark curse on Harry's scar, and that the Potions Mistress (who happened to be his stepmother) believed she'd found a cure. James, Alice, Neville, Hermione, Poppy, and Dumbledore were present. Lily, who was now a toddler, was in their quarters being watched by Truby. Ginny had wanted to be there, but it was a secret that she knew anything about it.

"Harry," said Alice as she looked at her ten-year-old stepson. "This will be a painful process, and I'm afraid that there's nothing that can be done to stop that. Any other potions or spells could interfere with this. We don't have to do it now if you'd like to wait..."

"I want to get rid of this, now!" he declared with a determined expression.

"Very well."

While Alice filled a vial with a potion that was spinach-green and smelled worse than the basilisk remains had, Poppy used her wand to make a thin incision inside Harry's lightning-bolt scar, thus reopening the wound. Harry cringed, but managed to stay still. James

admired his son's bravery, as well as the precision with which the school healer performed the surgery. Neville seemed to get a bit green and turned away while Hermione observed, fascinated.

"Are you alright?" asked Mrs. Potter.

"Mmmhmm," replied Harry, while still gritting his teeth as a trickle of blood began to flow from the new cut.

Poppy then filled a dropper with a clear liquid, which Harry knew had some basilisk venom in it. "At the same time?" questioned the healer, to which Alice nodded.

Harry cringed again when the vial of disgusting green potion was held to his lips, and wished his hands were free so he could hold his nose while the revolting fluid was poured down his throat. He hardly noticed the clear liquid being put into his scar until it started to bubble as a green smoke began to escape through the incisions. He'd barely finished swallowing before he screamed out in pain. He found himself struggling against the ropes that held his hands down, desperately wanting to touch his scar. Everyone in the room cringed while they watched him go through the torturous pain, but they all knew it was necessary. That fact didn't make watching or enduring it any easier.

After about a minute, the green smoke stopped coming from Harry's scar, and he stopped screaming. He whispered, "Mum," before his body suddenly went into a seizure, shaking uncontrollably, and he started screaming again.

Both Poppy and Alice looked worried. It was supposed to be over once the Horcrux was gone. Alice said, "I knew it would be a shock to his system, but that potion should've compensated!" as she watched helplessly while Madam Pomfrey tried to stabilize her patient.

"His heart is beating too fast and increasing; he's not responding to anything I do. He looks like he's about to have a heart attack!"

"Oh my God!" Alice exclaimed as tears began to fall freely from her eyes. "I've killed my..."

At that moment, there was a burst of flames above Harry, and Fawkes the phoenix appeared above him. Swooping down, he shed three tears into the boy's mouth and then two on his scar. He then flew to Dumbledore's shoulder.

Harry's seizure stopped instantly, and it was unnecessary for Poppy to say, "His heart beat has slowed down to about normal and his vital signs are stabilizing," after she performed a diagnostic spell.

While gasping to catch his breath, Harry moved his head and looked around. "Is it over?" he asked. "Is it gone?"

Smiling through her tears, his mum said, "Yes. It's gone," before engulfing him in a hug.

-

They celebrated more that day than on the kids' birthdays, which were all coming up soon, one after the other. The next day, Dumbledore asked to meet with James and Alice in his office.

"Thank you for coming," he said as they were seated. "Congratulations again, Alice, on inventing that potion."

"It wouldn't have worked without Fawkes' help," she said before turning to the magnificent bird. "Thank you, Fawkes." He trilled a note that she took to mean, 'You're welcome.'

"Would either of you like a lemon drop?"

"No, thanks," said James.

"Very well. I asked you both here because I will be needing your help, as well as several other staff members help, to guard a very rare and priceless object that I will be taking care of for a friend."

"Really?" asked Alice.

"Yes," he answered. "Have either of you heard of the Philosopher's Stone?"

What If Snape Died? – Chapter 34 – Harry Starts School

“Harry!” shouted the youngest Weasley as the Boy-Who-Lived gracefully stepped out of the fireplace at the Burrow carrying his Nimbus 1800. He’d written her a letter the previous day saying simply, “I’m cured!” but this was their first time seeing each other since his mum destroyed his Horcrux – the final one – two days before. She engulfed him in a tight embrace that made him blush, but he did not pull away. He hugged her tightly as she whispered, “I’m so glad you’re alright.”

“Come on! Let the man breathe,” said Ron. “You’re acting like you haven’t seen him in a year.” He then smirked at his little sister. “I wonder how you’ll act when we are gone for a year. You’ll probably choke him to death to show how much you missed him.”

Ginny frowned at the thought as they broke apart. She knew that once Harry was officially a student that he wouldn’t be able to come and go as he pleased, so they wouldn’t see each other much in the coming year. She’d tried to talk her mum into letting her visit the castle on weekends, but had been told that it wouldn’t be allowed. Neither the boys nor her best female friend – Hermione – would have time to visit her even if she made it to the castle. While Harry and Hermione had assured her that if she did somehow get to the castle they would visit her, this did nothing to raise Ginny’s spirits. She’d gotten both of them to promise to write her lots of letters while they were in their first year at Hogwarts.

“Now, Ron, don’t be rude,” admonished Mrs. Weasley. “There’s nothing wrong with a nice hug for your friends.” She then turned to all of them. You can all go outside and enjoy this beautiful day. The twins are already outside.

“Thanks,” said Harry as Neville was emerging from the fireplace carrying their nearly three-year-old sister, who currently had bright yellow hair. By this time, Lily was able to control her metamorphic powers enough to keep the same hair color when she wanted to, and she seemed to like having a new hair color every day.

“Hi, Auntie Molly,” the little girl said as she worked her way out of Neville’s grip and ran to her godmother.

“Hello, Lily,” the Weasley matriarch exclaimed while hugging her tightly. The girl’s hair turned red before the hug had ended.

Harry interrupted this reunion by asking, “How’s Charlie doing?”

“Oh,” she said with a frown. “He wrote that he’s happily settle down at that...dragon reserve. I wonder when he’ll come to his senses and get a nice proper job at the Ministry.”

“I think he should’ve taken that offer to play Quidditch!” said Ginny enthusiastically.

“Yeah,” agreed Harry. “Getting paid to play Seeker. What better job could there be?”

“Something less dangerous,” said Molly.

Harry shut his mouth to stop himself from answering with a smart-alecky response like *‘dealing with exploding toilets is safe, is it?’*

Neville did have an answer. “It seems to me that every job has its risks, Mrs. Weasley. How many times has Mr. Weasley been in danger while doing his job?” She didn’t answer. “Our parents used to be aurors, which is even more dangerous. Even Professor Sprout has a dangerous job dealing with plants like Mandrakes and Devil’s Snare. Mum deals with potions that could explode every day. Even catching gnomes can be risky if they bite. That’s why I think they should do what they enjoy.”

Harry turned to his brother. “I think you’ve been hanging out with Hermione a bit too much.” He noticed Neville’s ears turn slightly pink before he went outside to play.

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It took about four hours of swimming and Quidditch before Harry had the chance to talk to Ginny alone about the procedure that he’d gone through to remove his curse (he didn’t tell her it was a Horcrux).

“Your scar looks different now – less noticeable,” she said. “What exactly did they do?”

"Well," he said nervously, looking at the ground, "They couldn't use any potions or spells on me to put me unconscious or dull the pain."

Her eyes went wide. "You were awake? How could you stand it?"

"I just remembered that I was getting rid of a piece of Voldemort!"

"A piece of him?" she asked. "I thought it was just a curse."

"Well, er, I meant it was from him." He cleared his throat. "Anyway, Madam Pomfrey cut my scar open again and..."

Ginny looked horrified. "And you just laid there?"

"It didn't hurt much," he said, shrugging. He then continued to describe the entire procedure to her.

"You were very brave," she said when he was finished.

"Maybe to drink that potion," he replied while blushing. "That was awful."

"Ha-ha," she fake-laughed. "Your mock-humility is very impressive." He scowled before she continued, "but you really were brave. I'm proud of you." She then kissed him on the cheek and walked off so fast that she didn't see his entire face turn Weasley red.

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The next week went by quickly, and soon it was time to have the triple-birthday party for 3-year-old Lily and 11-year-old Neville and Harry. The family arrived at the Burrow together. Lily looked around at the Weasleys, and turned her hair red, as was her custom at her godparents' house.

"Hi, Auntie Molly," she said happily as she escaped her mother's hold.

"Hello, Sweetie!" she exclaimed as she hugged the girl. "Happy birthday!"

"Tanks!"

"You're welcome," said Molly. She looked at the others. "Remus, Sirius and Draco are already here. They're outside with Arthur and the kids. I expect that Hermione's family will arrive shortly."

Harry immediately went out the door to greet the Weasley children and the others. He saw that Luna was there as well.

"Hi, Luna. Thanks for coming."

"I heard that there were some triple-eared panglosses migrating here," she replied.

He nodded with a smile and walked up to Sirius, engulfing him in a hug. "Hi, Uncle Padfoot."

"Hey, cub. Happy birthday."

"Hi, Harry," said Draco. Although neither would actually admit it, they had become good friends over the past couple of years, and Malfoy had lost most of his arrogance. At this point, Neville tolerated him a lot more than he used to, but wouldn't be friends. "Happy birthday."

"Thanks, Draco."

At that point, he was hugged by his best friend. He put his arms around her in response. "Hi, Ginny."

"Happy birthday, Harry."

"I'll be saying that to you in a few weeks," he commented.

She looked him in the eyes, and for the thousandth time, reminded him, "Don't forget to write me from Hogwarts."

He looked offended. "How could I forget that? I'll be thinking about you all the time, crying myself to sleep every night..."

"You'd better be," she said in a mock-serious tone. They both laughed.

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Harry and his siblings enjoyed that party, as well as the one on Ginny's birthday a few weeks later. Before Harry knew it, he was at Platform Nine and Three-Quarters with his family.

"I still don't see why we left Hogwarts just to ride a train there," he said.

"It's part of the experience," said James. "Besides, you don't want to be treated any differently than you already are, do you?"

"No," said Harry.

Neville added, "People will think that the Boy-Who-Lived thinks he's too good to ride the Hogwarts Express."

"At least we didn't make you carry your trunks," said Alice, "Just a small bag with your robes."

"Hi, Harry!" Hermione's voice called from behind him. He smiled as he turned to greet his friend.

"Hi, Hermione."

"Hi, Neville," she said, turning her attention to his brother.

"Hermione," Neville acknowledged.

Harry noticed that both slightly blushed. "Let's find a compartment," he suggested.

Within a few minutes, Draco arrived with Sirius and found them easily. At the last minute, the Weasleys arrived. Harry was amused to see Ginny running after the train when it started moving.

It was a largely uneventful trip, although about halfway through the trip, while Neville was using the restroom, the door to their compartment opened, revealing three first-year boys. The one in the middle was smaller than the other two, but looked a lot smarter. He glared disdainfully at Draco for a moment, and then at Ron. His eyes finally rested on the other boy.

“Is it true,” he demanded, “Is Harry Potter in this compartment?”

“I heard that rumor, too,” said Harry with a grin while his companions were silent. He was glad that he’d decided to wear a baseball cap, along with perfect muggle clothes. “I think he must be in the next car...if he’s even actually coming to Hogwarts. Last summer, I heard he was going to Beauxbatons.”

“No,” said Nott. “My dad said he was definitely gonna be at Hogwarts. His parents are teachers there. He’s probably already there...too good to ride the train. I don’t recognize you two,” he said while indicating Hermione. “Are you from wizarding families?”

Harry answered before Hermione opened her mouth. “We’re brother and sister. Our parents are muggles – dentists.”

Nott sniffed the air distastefully. “I should’ve known.” He turned to his companions. “Let’s go.” He slammed the compartment door shut behind him while muttering something about Blood Traitors and Mudbloods stinking up the train.

“I believe,” said Draco, “that was Theodore Nott, Vincent Crabbe, and Gregory Goyle. They used to visit Malfoy Manor before...before I was living with Sirius.”

“You shouldn’t have lied like that, Harry,” said Hermione. “He’ll find out the truth at the Sorting anyway and be mad at you.”

He shrugged. “I just wanted to test him. He wanted to be friends with the Boy-Who-Lived to improve his status. He’s nothing but an arrogant bigot. You heard the rubbish he was mumbling on the way out. I don’t want to be friends with him.”

At that moment, the door opened, revealing Neville. “Hey guys, did I miss anything?”

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As promised, Harry and Ginny did write back and forth during that year. While Harry did enjoy reading his letters from his best friend, they didn’t contain much interesting information, since not much

happened at the Burrow. Here are some of the letters that Harry sent her.

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September 1st, 1991

Dear Ginny,

The train ride was fun, aside from some kids that were later sorted into Slytherin coming to our compartment looking for 'Harry Potter.' I'm glad I was wearing that hat to cover my scar. I told him that I was Hermione's brother and that our parents were muggles, so he left to look in other compartments. He was mad when my name was announced at the sorting, but couldn't do a thing about it since he was at the Slytherin table already.

I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. The first-years rode the boats with Hagrid. That's actually my first time on those boats, and the castle looks fantastic from that perspective. Anyway, Ron, Hermione, Neville and I were sorted into Gryffindor. Draco was sorted into Ravenclaw. I think Neville's happy that he won't have to sleep in the same room as Draco, but I think it would've been good. At least he's not in Slytherin.

Professor Dumbledore announced that Professor Sinistra was cursed from behind last week, and is currently at St. Mungo's. Astronomy is going to be taught by someone named Professor Quirrel. Dad says I shouldn't insult teachers, but the guy seems afraid of his own shadow, and he's got this ridiculous purple turban that he wore to the feast. Hopefully, he'll be a decent teacher because my parents didn't teach me that stuff in our lessons. They were mostly Defense, Charms, Transfiguration and Potions.

By the way, the Marauder's map is now giving me the passwords to the secret passages again.

Anyway, I wish you were here, and am glad you will be next year.

Your friend,

Harry.

-

September 8th, 1991

Dear Ginny,

You're not gonna believe it, but I'm the new Seeker on the house Quidditch team! Professor McGonagall had seen me flying with my dad a lot, and when Oliver Wood told her he hadn't found a decent Seeker to replace Charlie yesterday at tryouts, she talked Dumbledore into bending the rules a bit so I could play even though I'm just a first-year. Oliver gave me a private tryout a few hours ago and looked really happy when he said I was on the team! I was excused from the flying lesson with Madam Hooch in a few days. Practice starts this week. I can't wait until our first game. Dad wanted to get me a new broom, but mum said I could wait a few years to replace my Nimbus 1800.

I miss you and wish you were here!

Your friend,

Harry

-

November 1st, 1991

Dear Ginny,

You'll never guess what happened yesterday. During the Halloween feast, Professor Quirrel burst into the Great Hall announcing that there was a troll loose in the dungeons. I wonder why he was out there, anyway. It's not very common for teachers to miss the Halloween Feast.

Anyway, Ron had been a git earlier that day. Just because Hermione could do the levitation spell before he could (he didn't notice that Neville and I were also doing it) he told her she was a nightmare, a

know-it-all, and some other unkind things. She ran off to cry in the girls' bathroom. Neville and I had tried to get her to leave, but she wouldn't and neither of us wanted to barge into the girls' loo. She was still crying in there during the feast, so after Quirrel made that announcement, I got Neville to come with me to warn her. Ron followed us. I guess he felt guilty.

We made it there just in time to see the troll walk in with Hermione. She screamed and we ran into the room. Neville and I shot reducto's at its feet (since dad said stupefies don't work well on trolls or giants), making it fall down. Ron managed to levitate its club above its head and drop it, knocking it out just before mum, dad, and Professor McGonagall showed up. We told the truth about what happened and McGonagall took five points each away from Hermione and Ron. She then gave five points to both Neville and me, so it evened out.

Hermione and Ron are getting along again, but I don't think he's actually apologized. Anyway, I hope your family can get here for the Quidditch match next weekend.

I miss you and wish you were here.

Your friend,

Harry

-

Clad in a Gryffindor uniform, Harry mounted his Nimbus 1800 and flew out to the pitch with the rest of his teammates. He couldn't believe that Oliver would remind him of that game three years ago when he was nearly killed just before his debut. He shook those thoughts out of his mind while Wood was shaking hands with the Slytherin captain, a thug named Marcus Flint. The balls were released and the whistle blown. Harry had seen the Snitch disappear one second before Hooch had started the game. He flew up above the action and looked around.

He grinned when he noticed a group of redheads sitting next to his family in the stands. He knew they were there more to cheer on Fred and George than him, but he was still glad the Weasleys had come.

He continued scanning the pitch until he noticed that the Slytherin Seeker, Terence Higgs, was watching him instead of looking for the Snitch.

Harry put a determined expression on his face and dove straight down in a feint. He could hear his opponent follow him.

Lee Jordan announced, "It looks like Harry Potter has seen the Snitch. Higgs is right behind him. Wait. Potter's pulling up! It was a feint. Higgs just crashed. Slytherin calls a time out."

Harry flew back up into position and looked around. He spotted the Snitch for real, near Gryffindor's goals. He casually drifted in that direction, waiting for play to resume. The whistle blew, and Harry started zooming off, until his broom bucked. He grabbed it tighter and it bucked again. And again. It kept that up until he fell off the broom and was holding on by a hand.

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As soon as Harry's broom bucked the first time, James angrily exclaimed, "Someone's jinxing his broom," and started scanning the pitch with his Omnioculars. "Quirrel! Alice, try to help Harry stay on the broom while I stop that stuttering..."

"Be sure to save a piece of him for me," hissed Alice as she pulled out her wand.

In no time, James was in a position where he could aim his wand at Quirrel, who was only looking at Harry, and silently stun him.

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Harry climbed back on his broom to see that the Snitch was still in its former position and Higgs hadn't spotted it yet, so he zoomed off, managing to catch it five seconds later, ending the game. He flew down to where his family was at. "Hi Ginny," he said.

"Hi," she replied.

Suddenly, Harry realized that someone was missing. "Where's dad?"

"There," said Alice, pointing at a raven-haired man levitating the turban king. "Professor Quirrel was jinxing your broom."

"He what?" Harry exclaimed. "That does explain the problem. I see dad took care of it."

"You'd better go to the changing room with your team," said Harry's mum. "Congratulations on getting the Snitch."

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Seven minutes later, Harry emerged wearing his normal clothes to be immediately hugged tightly by Ginny. "Harry, it's so good to see you! I was so scared when your broom started acting up."

He hugged her back and grinned. "I'm really glad to see you again, too. Do you know where dad took Quirrel?"

"The hospital wing. They're trying to find out why he attacked you. Everyone else followed them but I stayed behind to let you know."

"Thanks. That's where we're going. I want answers." He took her hand and they marched into the castle.

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"This is odd," exclaimed Madam Pomfrey as she waved her wand over the unconscious man. "There appears to be some sort of dark curse on Professor Quirrel's head." The Weasleys, Potters (including Neville minus Harry) and Hermione were in the room.

"So that's not just a bunch of garlic in his turban?"

"James!" scolded Alice automatically.

"Perhaps you should remove the turban, Poppy," said Dumbledore.

"No!" hissed a high-pitched voice that seemed to be coming from the back of Quirrel's head. The unconscious man suddenly sat up, his eyes still closed. He waved his hand and everybody was blown backward from him.

Dumbledore calmly said, "Hello, Tom. It's been a long time," as he got up to his feet.

James pulled out his wand and aimed it, only to find it summoned out of his hand as Quirrel's finger pointed at it. The possessed man pointed it at James and said his favorite word. "*Crucio!*"

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Harry and Ginny were just outside the door when they heard the cruciatus curse. Harry immediately recognized that particular unforgivable. "Get behind me," he whispered to his companion as he pulled out his wand.

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Voldemort released the curse from James so that he could fire a *reducto* at the floor in front of Dumbledore that caused him to fall before he could shoot another spell. Riddle knew he wasn't in a condition to duel the second-greatest wizard of the age and began running out of the room, finally causing Quirrel's eyes to open so he could see both in front and behind. Just before leaving he put a powerful shield between them and the doorway to give him time.

He swung the door open and was immediately hit by a, "*Reducto!*" fired by the Boy-Who-Should-Be-Tortured-To-Death. It shot the left hand off.

Riddle was glad that he couldn't feel Quirrel's pain as he shot a "*Crucio!*" at the boy who dared attack him.

Harry dropped his wand as he writhed in pain. Ginny dove down, grabbed the discarded wand, and shot a bat-bogey hex at Quirrel in less than two seconds. Mucus bats emerged from both his nose and behind the turban. It looked like something was dancing around inside the purple headpiece. "Get the bloody turban off!" a high-pitched voice hissed from behind the hat.

"Good one, Ginny," said Harry as she handed him his wand back. While Quirrel's remaining hand was pulling at the turban, the boy

shouted, "*Petrificus Totalus!*" and the figure fell to the ground while the bat-bogeys were still attacking him.

Harry ran to the prone figure at the same moment Voldemort's shield was brought down by Dumbledore. Everyone ran out of the hospital wing to see that Quirrel had been overcome by the two kids. "Harry," said James before being interrupted.

"Did you think a first-year spell could overcome Lord Voldemort?" hissed the now-moving figure of Quirrel as he got up. The bat-bogeys were gone.

"Voldemort?" whispered Harry, now looking scared.

Quirrel grabbed Harry with his right hand saying, "Put down your wands if you want the boy to...Ahhhh!" The possessed man looked down at his now dissolved right hand as Harry was freed from his grasp. "What is this magic?" he asked.

Dumbledore said, "Harry, touch Quirrel's face," and the boy obeyed. Voldemort screamed as his host body was turned to ashes. Albus calmly stated, "Tom, it may interest you to know that Slytherin's ring, Slytherin's locket, your diary, Ravenclaw's tiara, Gryffindor's helmet, and even the accidental Horcrux that was placed in Harry have all been destroyed. Goodbye."

"No!" Voldemort screamed as Quirrel's remains fell to the floor. For a moment, a spirit seemed to form above the ashes, but it dissolved with a scream as the others, including Harry, watched in shock. Ginny, along with Alice and Hermione, ran up to Harry and engulfed him in a hug.

"It would appear," said Dumbledore, "that this is the end of Voldemort. One hundred points to Gryffindor."

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Harry seemed to be depressed and feeling guilty about Quirrel for killing the professor. He did go to the victory party in Gryffindor tower and put on a smile, but his heart wasn't in it. However, with support from his family and friends, he was doing better by Christmas, when

the Weasleys, Grangers and Potters all visited Romania and got to see the dragon reserve where Charlie was working. Harry commented that one day he'd like to ride a dragon, and the others told him he was crazy.

The rest of the school year passed slowly for Harry, as he missed his best friend Ginny at the Burrow. Gryffindor won the Quidditch and House cups. Hermione, Harry and Neville were the top three in all their classes (Neville was top in Herbology; Harry was top in Defense; Hermione was top in everything else).

Before they knew it, the group was exiting the Hogwarts Express at Kings Cross Station. James and Alice had ridden the train with their kids since they decided to spend the summer in a new house they'd bought after selling the one's they'd lived in with their former spouses. Draco ran to Sirius and hugged him. Molly hugged Ron, Fred, George and Percy in turn. Ginny ran up and hugged Harry, saying, "I'm so glad you're back and I'll be going with you next year! Now we'll never have to be apart for that long again!"

The End

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Please review. Thank you to those who have.

I had planned on writing more about Harry's Snape-less Hogwarts years, but they were too peaceful to be that interesting (apart from pranks and illegal visits to Hogsmeade). Suffice it to say that Harry and the others didn't have to put up with Voldemort plots, Dementors or evil teachers during their time at Hogwarts. Harry and Ginny were inseparable at Hogwarts and started dating in her third year, which was the year of the Triwizard Tournament. Cedric Diggory was the only Hogwarts champion, and he won the tournament. After Harry passed his N.E.W.T.s, he became a Seeker for Puddlemore United. He continued to live with his parents in the castle, mainly so he could stay near his then-fiancé, Ginny Weasley. They married a few weeks after she took her N.E.W.T.s, and she became a Chaser for the same team as her husband.

If anyone feels like writing one-shots of any of the implied events, let me know.